

MotherVerse

Winter 2006
Issue 3



A Journal of Contemporary Motherhood

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*Cover photo of
Florence Owens
Thompson and
her nursing child
in 1936.
Additional
information
can be found on
page 34.*

MotherVerse Magazine is a literary journal which examines the intricate nature of motherhood through unique works of fiction, poetry, visual art and personal essays. We recognize that mothers hold a unique place in the web of life and that as caregivers, creators, thinkers, artists, activists and women are important builders of culture and community.

We know that motherhood is worth print and that by opening a dialogue across cultural, political and geographical lines we can connect mothers from across the globe to create a stronger, wiser and more humane world. We welcome you to join us by submitting your writing, art and opinions. We are always in search of intelligent, thoughtful and bold voices to fill our pages.



Visit us at www.motherverse.com or Email editor@motherverse.com

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Editor-in-Chief Melanie Mayo-Laakso

editor@motherverse.com

Two Harbors, MN USA

Additional Editors

Jessica Mayo-Swimeley

Kelsey Mayo

Kate Mayo

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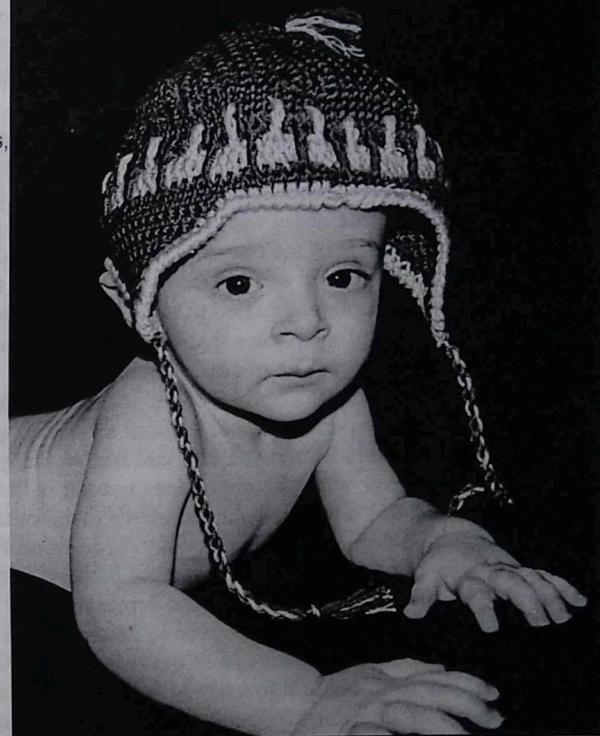
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Please See Page 40 for Submissions

Guidelines and Page 43 for Advertising

MotherVerse is printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper using recycled toner

Photo by Jennifer Summer
See more of her work and her bio on page 10



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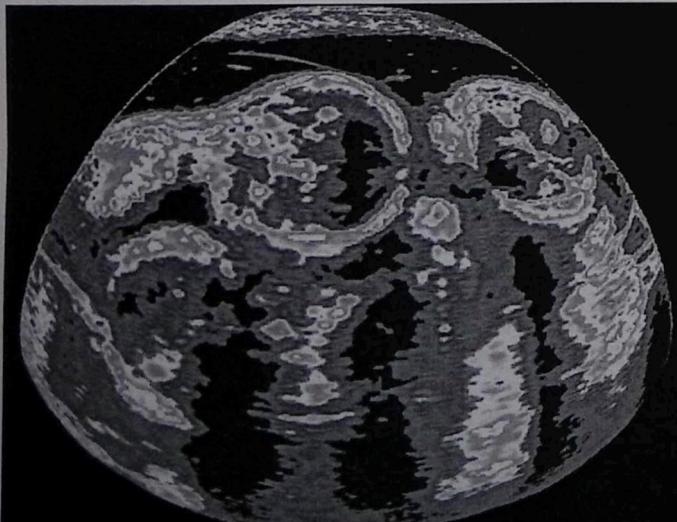
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What is the importance of looking at motherhood in history and what role do contemporary women play in revealing it? These are questions I asked myself as I compiled the history section of this issue. The questions were really provoked by the cover photograph we chose to use. The cover photo is of Florence Owens Thompson, a woman whose face has become the quintessential image of the great depression and the resilience of American mothers. We chose this photo, one of several in the *Migrant Mother* collection taken by Dorothea Lange in 1936, because of the sense of raw motherhood that it conveys. In great simplicity, the photo seems to let loose something true about the state of motherhood, and although it was taken seventy years ago, the relevance of the image is still apparent and somehow familiar. The choice to place Florence on the cover was not, however, a wholly uncomplicated one. In her lifetime Florence, who saw her image pasted in newspapers and journals across the country, came to resent the popularity of the photos that portrayed her as a helpless victim of a cruel and bitter time in American history. The photos, which were taken while Florence cared for her children in a roadside tent after her car broke down, leave much of her story untold. The images from the collection seem to portray a poor migrant mother desperate to feed her children, a woman who came to California for a better life, and like so many others, could not find it. In part this story is true, however what the photo does not tell is that Florence was no typical migrant worker. Florence was a Native American from Oklahoma and had already lived in California for a decade when Lange photographed her. In addition Florence was by no means a helpless victim, she was an active participant in labor protests of the day which strove to improve the lot of many poor working families in the depression era. The truth is that Florence may not have liked to see her face on the cover of MotherVerse and this has left me with a lot of questions about what right I have in examining her story. What began as the search for a cover photograph ended up being a journey of exploration into a woman's life. The birth of her children, the fear she had of their loss, the death of her husband, the constant battles of class and race and the public eye. That said, Florence, we hope we you would have approved of us bringing to light some of your own hidden tale for our readers, and we gratefully thank you for gracing our cover.

Please see pages 34 and 35 for other photographs in the collection as well further information, sources, and links to articles exploring the depression era and Florence's own personal story. One specifically article titled *Photographic Licence* by Geoffrey Dunn is particularly insightful.



Heidi Fremann (cover artist for Fall 05) is expecting triplets and her husband kindly sent us one of the ultrasound images. She is on bed rest and awaiting the birth of their possibly identical girls before mid-April.

Heidi and her husband Leslie are both visual artists living in Australia. Their work can be found at groups.msn.com/reanimatedresidue and poizomyst.deviantart.com

Congratulations Heidi and Leslie!

Betel Nut Beauty

by Eugenia Chao

Take the areca nut, which was marinated in milk and dried in the sun, and cut it open. Stuff a stub of fiber made of inflorescence from a betel plant between the cheeks of the open nut. Wrap this in a betel leaf folded in half, stem removed, smeared with some red-brownish goop that looks like dirty blood. Then you have a betel nut, Taiwan-style. It looks exactly like a vagina, a round, crisp, green one with a reddish brown stub-shaped clitoris.

I didn't always have to prepare and sell betel nuts. I used to have a better life, and certainly deserved one.

I see Moli, sitting at the betel nut stand in a lime green T-shirt and white skirt talking on the cellphone with that no good boyfriend of hers again.

"Aw really? But I wanted to go...okay. Tomorrow night. Keep your promise, Feng!"

She hangs up, her mouth in a pout, and my heart hurts for her.

She's my oldest daughter and I named her after the jasmine flower. Even a flower has more self-esteem than her, letting a man play her like that. I've told her many times to dump him.

"He's married," I say to her as I hand her a bag of betel plant leaves, "It's no use. And have you forgotten your father? How he ran off with a little tart and left us to make a living selling these dirty *bin-lang*?"

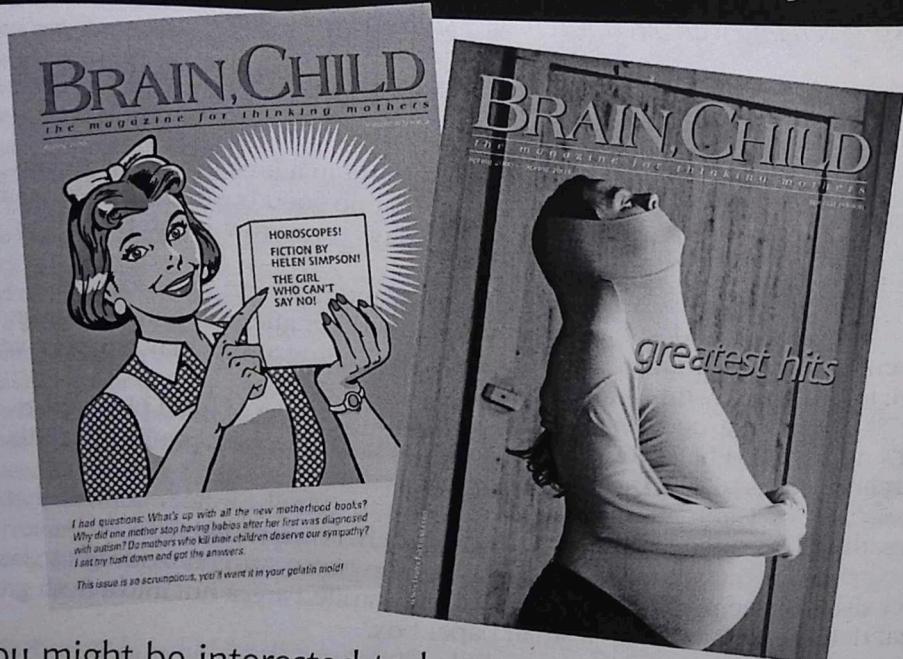
"Don't talk about it like it's my fault." Moli mutters beneath her breath. How can a daughter talk like this to her own mother?

Haili, the younger one, doesn't say anything, and pretends not to hear her sister or see my anger. She only folds a stuffed areca nut into a fresh green leaf deftly and puts it into a small paper box.

Our betel nut stand has little Christmas lights around it and a transparent refrigerator case to keep the prepared betel nuts fresh. The stand faces an alley that turns away from and back to a main road, a good location for our business. This isn't one of the neater neighborhoods in Taipei, however; my husband had bought it when he first started his job and didn't have much money. He had promised to move to a bigger, nicer place after Haili was born, but soon after we brought her back from the hospital he ran off with the little tart. He lives in a grand house in the scenic mountains with that woman while we squat here in this ugly apartment with a betel nut stand in front of it, surrounded by sidewalks and roads stained by dog shit, water leaking from garbage bags and betel nut juice and open sewers that stink.

I should have been a well-dressed, leisurely lady who shopped in department stores and had afternoon tea with friends instead of squatting behind this *bin-lang* stand, peeling betel leaves apart, mixing lime tar with my daughters. A poem of mine won a Classical Chinese poetry contest in high school, but now I manage a betel nut stand. My ex-husband gave all his money to his little secretary to buy a house under her name, so by the time we were divorced, my girls and I got barely anything. He was a lawyer and knew all the tricks of family courts in Taiwan, and I had no money to hire a good lawyer to fight him back. I brought these girls up single-handedly. I tell them from my own experience what men are like. And do they listen? No.

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Moli used to be so chubby. Look at her now, a stick figure. One summer she decided to lose weight and she just kept losing, losing. She'd scream at me if I made her eat some real food; she would only chew gum, eat green grapes and drink winter melon tea all day.

There she is now, keeping her head down while wrapping betel nuts and putting them in little boxes. She and her sister, Haili, go through the motions during the slow time of day between three and five in the afternoon while I watch them from my seat in the back while I balance our accounts. I keep an eye on my girls and the customers so those dirty men won't put their salty pig hands on my young daughters. The pair of them have long hair, clear skin and small eyes; they deserve better.

We all deserve better.

Lam brings me some tea; I give him a smile.

Lam is a neighbor's son. His family moved out of town a few years ago but he stayed here. He's been sleeping on our sofa for years; he's like my adopted son. He helps around the house and is a good big brother to my daughters, being a good seven, eight years older than them.

I like having a man around the house. I feel less like a sad, divorced *o ba san*, old bag. Lam is a great comfort to me. I never had a son, but he is almost better than my own children--he's giving, considerate, and always willing to listen to me, unlike my daughters.

A man calls to Haili and Moli, "*Bin-Lang Si Se*" as he passes by on a small scooter. *Si Se* was one of the most beautiful women in Chinese history, but the way in which he says *bin-lang Si Se*, betel nut beauty, is leering, and I glare at him. He's a betel nut addict, you can tell from his teeth that are black from the stuffing in betel nuts and his loose gums. Most of our more frequent customers look like this.

"I'm sorry, ma, don't be angry." He calls in my direction, turning back to buy a box of betel nuts.

Haili accepts his crumpled one hundred NT bill and hands him a box.

My girls, seventeen and nineteen, are considered pretty in the neighborhood. But if they were any prettier I wouldn't let them work at this stand, it's too dangerous. Moli, almost model-like, is much taller than Haili, who is my size, about 155 centimeters.

People often say jokingly that I can sit at the *bin-lang* stand myself, I look so young, like my daughters' big sister, with the same upwards pointed little phoenix eyes. It's nice of them to say that of an *o ba san* like me. My skin is yellow, unlike the nice cream color when I was younger, I have crow's feet, bags under my eyes, and I have to dye my hair to hide the gray. I haven't gained an ounce since I got married, though, and from the backside I could pass as twenty-five, still, if it weren't for my hairstyle--short permed hair that is the fashion for middle-aged Taiwanese women.

We eat lunch separately but dinner together. Lam often cooks for us because he's a brilliant chef, my favorite is his soy-cooked pig feet and stir-fried squid, both of which he made tonight. I fill an extra large bowl of rice for him to show my gratitude and a large bowl for myself to show my appreciation.

*"I love walking down the untidy streets of Taipei;
everywhere the objects and passersby whisper, mutter, or
yell their stories in a secret language."*

"Pig feet again? Not me." Moli says, and puts down her chopsticks. "I'm sick of even smelling them, ugh."

Haili picks up some vegetables and puts them on her rice in silence. Whenever her older sister is being hostile, she joins her side automatically, I can sense it although she says nothing.

Lam takes a bite out of a squid at his corner of the table, looking down. I feel bad for him. My girls have been meaner and meaner to both him and I as they've grown. Adolescent girls are so ungrateful.

Moli puts an almost untouched bowl of rice back in the kitchen. Her sister follows her and I hear the two of them speaking in low voices in the kitchen. I only caught fragments of their conversation.

"I thought he canceled..."

"...I'm going anyway...to his house...don't care..."

"He might get angry..."

"...I have the right to..."

"...I don't know, Moli...you should be..."

"...like I care...my business..."

They wash their bowls and chopsticks noisily so that I cannot hear most of what they say. Soon Moli goes back to her room and Haili comes back to the table, peeling an orange.

A few minutes later, Moli emerges in the floral dress that she bought herself for her birthday, wearing makeup, blue eye shadow and blush. I don't like to see her with powder on her face, it makes her look artificial and shallow.

"I'm going out." She announces, one high heeled sandal already out the door.

"Where are you going?" I ask.

"Out." She says, and slams the door.

"What's wrong with your sister, Haili?" I ask my remaining daughter.

"Dunno." She says, and stuffs her mouth with a piece of orange.

Later at night I sit alone in the living room, mixing the stuffing for betel nuts. Most of the ingredients come in plastic bags, and I have to combine them in the right proportion: camphor, tobacco, nutmeg, clove, saffron, musk, coconut, fennel, gray-amber and turmeric. Lam is scrubbing the kitchen and bathrooms, something he does almost every other day. Our floors and wall tiles are always spotless. I can hear the eight o'clock soap opera on the television from Haili and Moli's room; at least Haili is still obedient enough to stay at home, unlike her big sister.

In the middle of the night, I am awakened by Haili's and Moli's voices. Moli sounds like she is crying.

I open their door and see my two girls hugging each other one Moli's bed.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

Moli sees me, wipes her tears with the back of her hand and her face screws into a scowl. When I see her face my mouth opens wide. Beneath her left eye, red and swollen from crying, is a purple and red bruise that nearly reaches her cheekbone.

"What did he do to you?" I demanded. I reach my hand out but she jerks away.

"None of your business!" Moli screams in a hoarse voice. She must have already been yelling before this.

"Ma..." Haili says, "Now is not a good time."

"Not a good time? When is it a good time? When your sister finally gets beaten to a pulp by that no good cheating bastard? When will you girls learn?" I am close to tears; I cannot bear the thought of my poor daughter being hit by a good for nothing man. My girls get hit by nobody, even their father never raised his hand to them when he was around.

"It's all your fault" Moli cries, convulsing. "You made me work in this dirty *bin-lang* stand, you ruined my life. He called me a dirty *bin-lang si se* and he says he doesn't want to see me again!"

I can feel myself turning pale. "You are not dirty, you are not a dirty *bin-lang si se*, you hear that? I will tell that man how wrong he is, you are good girls, my girls, it's not like you're working in the transparent betel nut booths next to the highway, exposing yourselves like prostitutes. You are not that! You are good girls, do you hear me? There is nothing wrong with our stand and what you do. That man is a bastard, he is wrong!"

"I don't care, you ruined my life! You hypocritical bitch! You talk about how horrible men are, that they cheat, prefer younger women, you are worse than all of them put together! You think we don't know about Lam? You think we don't know that he sneaks into your bedroom at night? And everything you do? You dirty, disgusting people! I'm sick of your pretending you are a perfect mother, you are such a fake!"

I slap Moli, I cannot help it. I slap her twice, once on her face, once on her shoulder as she turns. She is so much taller that I almost lose my balance reaching my hand towards her face with such force.

Haili forces her way between us, crying.

"Stop it, stop it, Mom, the two of you, stop fighting, stop talking like that, Moli."

"No, you know what, I've had enough of your silence, Haili. You know everything they do and you have no guts to say anything about it except to me. You're the one who told me about the noises you heard from your wall years ago, the noise of our mother being a huge disgusting whore! And now I hear it all the time, you're the one who made me realize what was going on and there you are with that look on your face, like you're oh so surprised, you're almost as bad as her, you pretender..."

I sink into Haili's bed, tears flowing. Haili looks at her sister with a frightened expression on her face. I see Lam's figure in the doorway. He had heard the crying and screaming. He must have heard every piercing word from Moli. I want to fall into his arms, but can't, not in front of my daughters. They have made me feel dirty. None of this is my fault. I told Moli not to date a married man. But she was stupid and wouldn't listen and finally got hit. I warned her, didn't I? It isn't my fault, I was a good mother...

A few words from Eugenia Chao

Being a writer is like being a mother. You become pregnant with a story; you take weeks, months, sometimes years giving birth and raising the piece until it leaps off the page and finds a life of its own.

I started writing because I loved to read. I continued writing because I believed that certain stories should be told. These were not necessarily "true"

stories, but ones that were true to life.

I was born and spent most of my life in Taiwan, so my literary "children" are Taiwanese. I write about my home country not just out of nostalgia, but also to depict the different lives and different people there.

I love walking down the untidy streets of Taipei; everywhere the objects and passersby whisper, mutter, or yell their stories in a secret language.

Taiwan is a small place, but it is filled with diverse people from different countries and backgrounds. Right now, there are Americans, Europeans, Filipinos, Japanese, Malaysians, Taiwanese, Taiwanese aborigines, Russians, Vietnamese, and many others living on the island. The foreigners come on business, come as domestic workers, as students, even as mail order brides. At this point the relationships between locals and foreigners have become both interesting and disturbing: racism, class and gender issues, and conservatism complicate these cross-cultural encounters. My current collection, "Taipei & Nipple," seeks to depict these relations.

I feel that Taiwanese literature is traditionally underrepresented. When one looks for the presence of Taiwanese writers in the international literary scene, few names come to mind at present other than Li Ong, who is popular in Germany. Taiwan has not been written about enough, though it certainly has stories to tell. I hope to tell those stories, especially at a time when no one is certain how much longer the place called Taiwan, Republic of China, will be able to live in peace.



Photo by Jennifer Summer

Jennifer Summer is a freelance writer, artist, photographer and full-time mother. She has had various literary works published in e-zines and magazines across the country. She resides in Indiana with her husband and sixteen month-old son, Dakota.

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Melanie Mayo-Laakso, MotherVerse Magazine

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Inconceivable

by Tina Duque Corbett

In me somewhere
Is the mother
of a child
in me somewhere.

I shudder for its life
and hate the undue promotion
I'll be handed.

I can see ahead:
the size of my shoes
filling up small eyes,
importantly adult.

These boots touch earth.
Please know that,
unbegun one,
ununited like myself.

One day you'll look back
at some picture perfect love,
secure it was all
set up for your purpose.

You won't see the clouds
in photo-frozen eyes
of the girl who
advances your being
according to directions,
while walking a crooked line
no one should follow.

This knowledge could well
crack your shell.

*Tina is a freelance copywriter,
poet and aspiring children's book
author. Her poetry has previously
appeared in the magazines Poet
and Kaatskill Life as well as
numerous literary journals.*



*Yama Uba nursing Kintoki by Japanese painter
Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1808)*

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Blood

by Terri Kent Enborg

I come from a long line of bleeders.

Too much information, I know, but it's important because this bleeding and the doubling-over cramps that come with it has resulted in early hysterectomies for my mother at 28, my sister who has no children at 36, and probably for me now at 41. Except that, unlike my mom who'd had the handful known as her two daughters by then and unlike my sister who'd come to terms with not having kids, I'm kicking and screaming and dragging my feet in the face of losing my own uterus and ovaries along with the dream I once had of having one more child.

Endometriosis turns the tidy little panty-shield sized periods we Hendershot women had as teenagers into the veritable blood lettings that marked my mother's and my sister's adulthood, and continue to mark mine. Aztec-rite looking ordeals requiring eight days blacked out of the calendar, the equivalent of twin mattresses between our legs, ritualistic Pepto-Bismol cocktails laced with Motrin, Iron, and essences of Vitamin B, and somber marches around our homes or places of work, ghost-faced in stages of anemic malaise. So, between this little festival and the PMS that comes beforehand, there's about one good week during the month when I am available for things that require exercise, in-depth concentration, or little husband-wife relationship-enhancing activities like, say, sexual intercourse.

My sister loves her hysterectomy. Well, not the surgery part, but the part where she no longer has excruciating pain and her hormones are finally leveled out with HRT. However, there was this little transition point before she was up to snuff on her hormones where she says she felt like committing hara-kiri. This part puts me off a tad because if it was that way for her, my relatively mellow sister, my hormone leveling period will be, in a nutshell, apocalyptic. The stuff of weeping and gnashing of teeth. But when she was staring down the operation and the hormone tweaking, and not me, I could make jokes (a bizarre family trait in times of sorrow). I wrote her a list of the top ten things she could do with her uterus, once it was out, number one being a purse with fallopian tube straps. Also, I entertained making a paper-mache' uterus on a stick, which I intended to present to her after the surgery with another list of why it, the paper one, was better than the real one, but she didn't find it that funny at the time. So, I filed the idea away in my studio under the heading of potential post-modern-feminist expressionism.

My sister had to work through some things on her way to parting company with her reproductive organs, and I am working through some of my own things as I get closer to the inevitable day. She never bore children and never will. I bore two and have raised one. I may never again see my firstborn, and our brief time together was obscured, watered down and painted over with the inky brush that marked me, "birthmother." My second born will continue to grow up without a sibling -- not only her older sister, but the other brother or sister she always hoped would be following her down the path that runs through me.

There was a time long ago, before I knew way too much about the subject, when we considered adoption, but that is something neither my husband nor I could now entertain as a personal choice. So, Cierra is going to

be raised an only child. Only, she really isn't one. Not just in the sense that she has a sibling out there, but in the sense that her sister's presence is felt as deeply in our family as is the lack of it every single day. This is, of course, sometimes confusing and sad for Cierra. I know there have been times when being apart in so strange a manner was also confusing and sad for her sister, but I don't know how she feels today because the adoption was closed some time ago.

When I look at Cierra, now eleven and much more, shall we say "in bloom" than I was at even fourteen, I know it won't be long before her first blood comes. When it does, we've already decided that we're going to celebrate her entry into impending womanhood rather than curse it. I plan on giving her a basket full of lotions and body fresheners and pads and tampons and brownies and books that tell her this doesn't have to be the big drag it was when I was her age, and when my mother and her mother and her mother's mother were. It can be a time when she can nurture herself, put her feet up, read "The Red Tent," and opt not to power through, pretending she is no different from a man.

Of course, the idea of celebrating Cierra's impending menses makes me wonder about my firstborn. Did she have the long wait until fourteen that I did? Did she ever think about that blood, how it ran through a long line of women she's never met before it got to her? If she is typical of her age or if she's at all like me, probably not.

I didn't even begin to consider the extent of the whole blood tie thing until my mother and I accidentally embarked on a genealogical expedition some years back that lead us to her long-lost but, unfortunately by then, deceased father and beyond him along the maternal line that traced the Oregon Trail and eventually lead to Ireland. My father's side was harder to track because so many records stopped with confederate money and the Civil War.

My mother compiled two bound novels that comprise as much family history as we were able to get so far. Fortunately, there are now computerized genealogy programs that made this far less cumbersome than it might have otherwise been, not to mention politically correct. There is a section of the computer program, and thus of our novels, that branches off to the children I've bore in a way that is both a little sad and a little funny, as most PC attempts tend to be.

On the pages that begin my novels there are two sections. On one side, there is Cierra's father with all of his familial information under the heading, "husband." On the other side, there is my oldest daughter's birthfather under the quaint heading, "friend," with as much of his familial information as my mother and I could find through his father's death record. When Cierra used to ask about the friendship a few years back, no doubt imagining her sister's father and me playing tag or sharing a snow cone, I'd say something along the lines of his being a "very special grownup friend," lest she get any ideas about buddying up down the road.

His side, my oldest child's birthfather's side, is hard to trace because he is African American and, unless his family came over after the days of slavery, a question I don't think he even knows the answer to, his family name would have been changed somewhere along the way and some of his ancestors were likely even assigned nothing more than a number once they were put on the ship. Also, he and I haven't been in touch for years, so it's not

like I can call him up and ask him for his great-grandfather's social security number in order to trace things back further. Maybe one day my firstborn will pick up that ball, or maybe she will have no interest whatsoever in the illusive orb that encompasses her heritage.

I look at these genealogy novels now and then and am amazed as I see the faces looking back at me from the past. There we are, the generations laid out, with all of our collective trials and hardships, divorces, marriages, births, deaths, incarcerations, betrayals, illnesses, heartaches - one of my great, great, great aunts and eight of her children died one day in April from Cholera -- and I realize I come not only from a long line of bleeders, but also from a long line of people who chose to keep going even when that going was damned hard, harder than any going should be.

I look back on my own life, my own rutted Oregon Trail and the times I've considered stepping off of it altogether, and I see that it is just a thin and relatively new branch off an ancient tree. Those before me stuck out the long haul across oceans and continents and unbearable loss. But in the mix of all that must have also been pockets of enormous joy and faith because, well, I am here ... and I only got here because something kept them going.

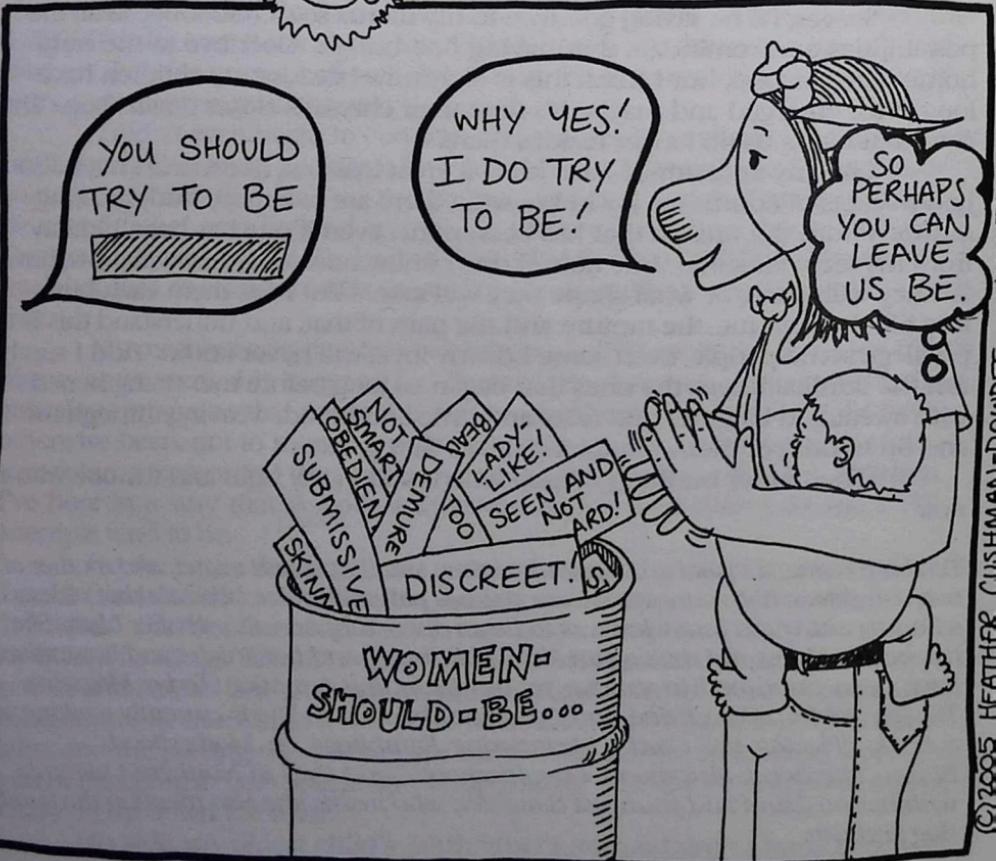
So, yes, I'll be saying goodbye to my uterus soon. Goodbye to all the possibilities and reminders that having one brings. Goodbye to the early home of my babies, but I think this is okay now because my children have long since emerged and maybe it's time their chrysalis closes down shop. The cord that binds us no longer resides there.

Like my ancestors, I have known great loss but, like them, I have also had pockets of enormous joy in knowing there are two more buds growing outward from the branch that has been mine, even if one has been hidden from my view for some time now. I don't know how long they will grow, how far they will reach, or what shape they will take. But I felt them each burst into life through me, the rapture and the pain of that, and understand this is a privilege some people, even some I dearly love, will never know. And I surely feel the familial fibers, the ones that began so long before me, strengthened with sweat and laughter and tears and time and blood, weaving through me and on to both of them, stretching me as they grow:

The tender budding branch who is still in my sight and the one who is not.

Terri is a writer, a visual artist/photographer, small business owner, and mother of two daughters: her youngest, whom she has parented since birth and her oldest, who was entrusted into what was to be an open adoption shortly after birth. She has been writing and making art since childhood, and her articles and illustrations have been published in various venues including Adoption Today Magazine, TheWholeMom.Com Ezine, and Adoption.about.com. She is currently working on a book, "Piecing the Cord: Meandering Ramblings on Motherhood, Birthmotherhood, Sisterhood, Daughterhood," and lives in Northern California with her husband and youngest daughter, who insists she also mention the family dog and fish.

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Compliments at Daybreak

by Jennifer Morgan Bishop

It's 6 o'clock in the morning
A high pitched voice chants "Hot Crossed Buns"
somewhere in the midst of my dreams
And I am awake...there really is no choice of hiding
in blankets
He expressed his persistence in the matter while in
the womb
That one of my own would rise so early is fate's
terrible sense of humor demonstrated

I used to play music in bars and sleep til 2 in the
afternoon
I still play music in bars...but there is no sleeping
We are walking to the park hand in hand by 8:30
and singing

I used to have space
Time to sit alone on a roof or bridge, contemplating
while drinking wine to a sunset
A room of my own, a bed of my own, a side of a bed
that was my own
I was 22 with a life of wonder and excitement
beckoning
Now, there are three struggling for bed space
throughout each restless exhausted night,
then struggling each day to catch up on what this
surprise family needs

I consider this as I stare in the mirror at dark
circles that have tatooed themselves beneath my once
mischievous and disastrous but now surrenduring brown
eyes

"You look so pretty mommy", he says to me

I look back at the figure in the mirror clad in a
men's undershirt and boxer shorts
How my hair can find the energy to reach out into so
many different directions at once,
so early and naturally,
I will never fully comprehend

This I know: No boy or man has ever held so much sway
with this simple statement,

"You look so pretty..."

I wink at my horrid reflection, turn on the radio
and share a dance with my prince
And never have I felt so beautiful and content

Jennifer Morgan Bishop has recently graduated from Texas A&M University with a degree in English and a minor in Philosophy and now works for the university as an Academic Advisor. She is also a songwriter/performer and has been awarded for songwriting from the Kerrville Folk Festival and received notable mention from the Woody Guthrie Folk Festival. She has been dabbling in Poetry since she was a teenager and her poetry is what led her to writing lyrics and then performing her music. Other poetry of hers can be found in "Brazos Gumbo", a regional publication.

Jennifer enjoys spending time with her 3 year old son Finnegan, also a promising vocalist, and her husband Manitou, who is studying at Texas A&M. They hope to soon move to the Northwest where they can enjoy the mountains and the Pacific Ocean.

Just Talk

by Hildie S. Block

She used to speak in whole sentences. Long, meandering sentences. Paragraphs too, sometimes. Occasionally an entire monologue. A rant they were called. At happy hour, as a younger woman she would occasionally hold court, a cheap yellow beer in one hand and spew off the sweat and blood and insult of the day at work. And people would look at her, amazed, and laugh. Then raise their glasses and drink.

This seems like a fantasy past. This seems impossible, like something that maybe never happened, or a dream, or a fictitious imagining. Like an exaggeration.

But she reminds herself, no. Once sentences existed, not just in her head, not just on the page, but flowing out of her mouth like a river. Someone once said her writing had the breathless quality of someone who could say it all without taking a breath. This too seems like a past, distant fading lie.

Now she limits her speech, mostly to one word. If she's lucky it's heard. If it's responded to, her day is made.

No.

Stop.

Please.

There are few times "Put it down," is heard but rarely.

Go.

Come.

Now.

Her husband interrupts himself, starts talking to the baby, when there is a moment, a pause in the noise and she tries to tell him something. Runs over him like a freight train, like labor through a pregnant woman. Not stopping, not pausing, not noticing. And it was not something totally frivolous, but something that she herself thought was important. Maybe she's wrong. Do it.

That's two words technically, but it's really run together. Doit, doit, doit. Now.

Potty.

Shoes.

Teeth.

Even at baby group she's truncated, if not by herself, being distracted by the leaf getting caught in the baby's throat then by the other mom, who has to catch the toddler just before he hits the ground. And by the time the tears have stopped, it's on to another topic.

Look.

Ok.

Whatever.

I don't care.

That's three words, but it's easier than trying to say what she thinks. She can say that and she's done, but to explain that maybe she could go either way, or that there are other issues at stake or that the answer is longer than a sound byte, by then the audience has moved on.

And as her voice is quelled, silenced, squashed, she hears the words she didn't speak rattle in her head. As she tries to sleep at night, the sentences

flow back to her. They dance. They jitterbug. They try to get her mouth, but it is dark. For every unfinished sentence, every unfinished thought, there is an end result.

I didn't know.

You never told me.

Why didn't we ...

So she starts to tell the baby, but the baby is more interested in the cat, who is furry and has a tail. The baby says "cat" and not "mama."

And then came the day she locked herself in the bathroom.

Anyone who was listening might have heard it coming.

No one heard it coming.

The lock on the bathroom door makes a click when you turn the knob. You can jimmy it from the outside, with a Phillips head screwdriver, but you'd have to want to do that. You'd have to not respect the lock to do that. You'd have to have exhausted asking her to open the door.

No one asked her to open the door.

Because they didn't want to interrupt.

They couldn't interrupt because she did not stop.

Not even to catch her breath.

Instead, they gathered like the tiny animals dressing Cinderella, magically, and silently and sat on the carpet outside the bathroom door. They stared at the door, at the knob that would not turn, marveling at what was inside.

They heard.

For what started as a quiet noise from inside, now rose and fell. It was a sound that they remembered, but had not heard in a long time.

She stared at her reflection and spoke. All of the unfinished sentences. They tumbled out of her like soap bubbles overflowing out of a mis-filled washing machine, they spilled on the floor and under the crack.

At first no one heard them, they were too busy at the table, making their own noise, telling their own stories and she just got up and left and went to the bathroom

And

Locked

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Door

And she looked in the mirror and said to her reflection, I will listen.

And she proceeded, at first, only to finish the things she tried to say at dinner. And no one yet had noticed. Then the baby cried, and the other one couldn't find something and the husband picked up the phone and called a friend, and eventually, the noise got so loud because the precious thing was still undiscovered and the friend on the phone was quiet, but the husband went on and on and on about some sporting event that NO ONE, not even the husband really cared about and the baby wailed louder and suddenly, at once they noticed that she was gone.

Not far. Ten feet only. But she had locked the door and she wasn't coming out, not until she got done what she'd come to say.

And

Not

Even

She

Knew

When

That

Might

Be.

*Hildie has a masters in writing from Johns Hopkins and lives in Arlington, Va. She has taught writing at American and George Washington Universities and currently leads fiction workshops for the Writer's Center (www.writer.org), one of the country's premier independent literary centers. An anthology she co-edited, *This Changes Everything: the Challenges of Motherhood*, will be published by Paycock Press in Fall 2006. Her stories have appeared in *Gargoyle*, *Cortland Review*, *San Francisco Review*, *Literary Mama*, *The First Line*, *E2K*, *Strata*, and *bee*, as well as in the anthology **Enhanced Gravity: More Writing by Washington Area Women** (and elsewhere). She's had some essays in *In the Fray*, *Pop Matters* and some other places as well. Her novel **Oh, and She has a Dog** is in search of an agent. She is mom to two children Cassie (6 years) and CJ (20 months).*



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Marked
by Kathleen Furin

my new lover traces my lines, my road map...
my history, and at the same time my path to the future
he is gentle
with my first the marks came late i didn't want any
i rubbed my belly with oil, vain...hoping to pacify her
sweet baby curled inside
when they came they looked like flames curling lips of fire low on my belly
and later i liked them, because they reminded me of her
my second daughter stretched me out earlier and more
the flames licked my belly button and then rose up,
not symmetrical, like smoke curling away from a lone campfire
like incense lit in sacred space
they spread out, gullies, rivulets running down my hips
waterfalls to remind me that
nothing will ever be the same
these, from her, i cannot hide. i want to.
Part of me feels embarrassed until i realize that
i cannot love you unless i love myself
these are from my moon baby i say, and you laugh delighted
tracing them with smooth brown hands
i know you wouldn't love me without them
sometimes they remind me of snakes
my daughter lays her smooth cheek on my belly and laughs
she too is drawn to them she traces smoky lines with her fingers digging deep
let's walk to georgia mama she says and I say OK
she is wild she wants to paint her hands and feet we do it
together then i lie down and we color in my marks...
red for the fire the love that burns between us
the passion that
marked our relationship before our eyes had even met
blue for the water our share of tears and
all we will learn from each other
green for the earth
mark my body green! as sacred yes i too have brought forth life
we leave some silvery white, for Air she says,
Air I breathed when we first disconnected
her sister toddles over, places her pudgy hand in the middle of my
belly and laughs and spits
they have both marked me both in different ways
and i know i look like the Goddess of Changes
you did this i say and you...this was you here and here and here
I did that one mama you say
I was writing on the inside, writing my love for you
Hoping you would notice
hoping you could read my script
I couldn't wait to touch you

Kathleen is the co-founder and co-director of the Maternal Wellness Center, which provides education, psychotherapy, and advocacy for pregnant women, mothers, and families. The website can be found at www.maternalwellness.org. She is a regular contributor to The Mother Magazine. Her work has also been published in Literary Mama, The Mother's Movement Online, The Birthkit, the web edition of Philadelphia Stories, The Expectant Mother's Guide, and is forthcoming in the Bucks County Writer, Mamazine, and Midwifery Today.

Muddy Path

personal tales of

motherhood at its most intense

Pain

by Suzanne Kamata

I was afraid of the pain. Almost from the minute I knew I was pregnant with twins, I dreaded "the trauma of childbirth." I could handle the three to five months of nausea, the insomnia, the weight gain, even the responsibilities of the next eighteen or so years, but not, I thought, "the most agonizing pain known to mankind."

My sister-in-law in Ohio gave birth to a six pound twelve ounce boy in two hours with an epidural. "It was almost fun", she told me. "I could feel him coming through the birth canal, but it didn't hurt." She showed me the video Elton John played on a boom box, her mother bustled about. My brother narrated the event.

"That's what I want, too", I said. Except instead of Elton John, we'd have Enya. There'd be champagne chilling in the mini-fridge. Of course, I'd have the epidural. And my mother wouldn't be in the delivery room just my husband, Yukiyoshi.

But I live in Japan and no one that I talked to here had ever heard of any kind of anesthesia during normal childbirth. My friend Mariko, who gave birth to a nearly ten-pound baby, was in labor for twenty-four hours with no pain relief. In Japan, I'd heard, a woman in labor was supposed to endure her pain in silence. If she cried out, she'd failed in some way. I vowed to be silent.

Even though they don't use anesthesia, Japanese women have age-old ways of reducing the pain. A small baby makes for an easy delivery and several women gave me advice on restricting the size of my twins.

"You should go for walks", a mother of two told me. "You don't want the babies to get too big."

"Don't let your legs get cold", another woman advised. "Cold legs can lead to a miscarriage."

In my fifth month of pregnancy, my mother-in-law announced that it was time for an *obi*, a thick band tied around my waist to keep the babies from getting too large. I was horrified. It sounded worse than Chinese foot-binding. Twins are usually underweight and I didn't want to do anything to impede their growth.

I asked my obstetrician about the practice, just to be polite. I had no intention of wrapping my middle.

"In the old days, he explained, "people had their babies at home. There was no recourse in the event of a difficult birth. They did whatever they could to have an easy labor.

I didn't go for walks. I lazed around on the sofa admiring baby clothes in the Land's End catalog. I watched CNN and ABC news on satellite TV. I snuggled under an afghan, keeping my legs warm. And I threw up. And then I started to bleed.

During my hospital stay for a threatened miscarriage, my room was across from the delivery room. I heard women screaming out in the night:

"Itai! Itai! Itai!" ("It hurts! It hurts! It hurts!") "Iya! Iya! Iya!" ("No! No! No!") I was terrified. I wondered if it was too late to change my mind.

The doctor recommended cerclage, a procedure in which the cervix is sutured shut to help prevent premature labor. After my first scare, he didn't have to work hard to persuade me.

"Do you want anesthesia?" he asked me. "And if so, what kind?"

He told me that some women went through the operation with no pain relief at all. It sounded brave, but I am a wimp. "Give me the spinal", I said.

Before the operation, I was jabbed with a needle in the arm. When it was time for the epidural, I assumed the fetal pose and waited for the prick in my spine, my delicate spine. In my home country, an anesthesiologist would have handled this part, but there was no one extra there, just the obstetrician and nurses. My mind was haunted by newspaper stories of mixed-up medicines and incompetent hospital doctors. If he missed, would I be paralyzed for life?

I was nude and everyone else was garbed in sterile blue, mouths hidden by ridged masks, only dark eyes visible. They didn't say anything except "This'll hurt." I wanted to ask someone to tell me a story, to distract me with words and questions like Dr. Reynolds back in South Carolina.

I felt a cool hand pressing on my thigh, keeping me still for the needle that was about to go in. The first time, I flinched a little, but didn't make a sound. It didn't really hurt until the liquid was injected, and then it ached so much that I clenched my jaw.

I heard the doctor sigh. "Sorry. Gotta try it again"

It took two more jabs before the needle was properly inserted. Each time I felt the same ache, but I didn't cry out. Not even a whimper.

I borrowed videos on Lamaze from the hospital. The woman in the first video made it look so easy. She didn't scream, although a few tears trickled down her cheek. The baby slithered right out of her and was suddenly at her breast.

The Lamaze method: Breathe in. Breathe out with the pain. In, out. I practiced. I thought that maybe it wouldn't be so bad after all.

I was surprised by blood again when I was six months pregnant.

"Threatened premature labor", the doctor said, and sent me to bed for the duration.

I was hooked up to an I.V. and my movements were restricted. I brushed my teeth while on my back and ate my meals at a forty-five degree angle. For ten days, my feet did not touch the floor. Even so, my belly continued to tighten with contractions and blood stained the white sheets.

I was transferred by ambulance to another, bigger hospital, one with lots of incubators and a brand new NICU (neo-natal intensive care unit). This time I had roommates, two other women who were expecting twins in July. Mine were due in September.

The other women were there according to hospital policy. Since there is an increased risk of premature labor for multiple pregnancies, women expecting more than one baby are put under observation as a matter of course in the eighth month.

We passed around magazines and brainstormed baby names. We traded snacks and old wives tales. We worried together about the pain of childbirth. My second night there, we talked about ordering a pizza in a few days. It was like an adult slumber party.

A friend brought me novels. I read all day. Once in awhile, a nurse came to monitor the babies heartbeats. They kicked and squirmed and their hearts were strong.

My parents called each morning from South Carolina and my mother-in-law dropped by with washed pajamas and cream puffs. My sister-in-law's husband's aunt came by along with a friend of my husband's family. "You shouldn't read", she told me. "It excites the mind and is bad for your baby. She said that I should lie quietly and talk to my babies. For three months.

My husband came every day after teaching high school P.E. and coaching baseball. He brought my mail. One evening, he brought a letter saying that one of my short stories, published the previous fall in a small literary magazine in Illinois, had been chosen by a famous poet for a literary anthology. I couldn't wait to tell my parents.

I was starting to relax. I was even beginning to enjoy myself. The doctor announced that I could start using the toilet again. The catheter was removed and I began testing my shaky legs, taking my first tentative steps toward wellness. Or so I thought.

The next morning, I woke soaked in blood. My roommates slept through my frantic call to the nurse. Soon, I lay on an operating table awaiting an emergency C-section. I was surrounded by Japanese-speaking strangers wearing blue gauze masks and matching smocks. My husband Yukiyoshi was outside in a waiting room with my wedding ring in his pocket (no jewelry allowed during surgery). The rest of my family was thousands of miles away. I had lived in Japan for ten years, but it had never felt as foreign as it did at this moment.

"Itai, itai, itai", I said. I'd gone through thirty minutes of labor and already my vow of silence was shattered. I was secretly impressed, however, by my ability to communicate in a foreign language in such extreme circumstances.

I'd expected everything to be different. I'd expected ice cubes in my mouth and my husband's fingers kneading my lower back. Instead, I was clutching the hand of a stranger and I was scared.

Someone told me to curl up in a ball. I eased onto my side and curled. I felt the needle slide into my spine, but this time it didn't hurt at all. My lower body became warm and then went quickly numb.

The obstetrician started swabbing my middle with antiseptic. Another man, identified as the neo-natal specialist, entered the room. "Twenty six week baby very difficult", he told me in heavily accented English. "I will do my best."

I looked at the clock. It was eight thirty in the morning. I didn't want to think about what was going to happen in the hours, days, weeks to follow.

I was sorry that I'd ever wished for an easy birth. With a few extra weeks in the womb, my babies lungs would have fully developed. They'd have enough fat on their bodies to maintain the proper temperature. They would have received vital antibodies and nutrients through the placenta. These gifts of the body made my fear of physical pain seem petty.

Minutes later, the obstetrician sliced open my abdomen and pulled out my son. I couldn't see what was happening because a screen had been set up over my chest, but I could feel the liquid ooze over my belly and the fish-like squirm of my 964-gram baby boy. "Kawaii", the nurse holding my hand said. "He's cute." I heard his cry a tiny mewling and then he was whisked away.

"Now we'll go in for the other one", Dr. Maeda said. He quickly delivered my 690-gram daughter, the one who had lived beneath my heart for six and a half months. And then she was gone, too.

I lay on the table, resigned and passive. This was supposed to be one of the most joyous moments of my life, but I felt like a failure. Although I'd tried to do the right thing throughout abstaining from coffee and alcohol, avoiding travel and smoky rooms - there was a chance that my babies wouldn't make it through the day.

Because I was recovering from surgery, I didn't see my children for twenty-four hours. My husband was allowed into the NICU and he reported back to me. "They're cute", he said, "but not like that." He pointed to the babies on the cover of one of my books. "They look like little baby birds."

The following evening, I was wheeled to the NICU and I saw my children for the first time. Their bodies were scrawny and red, but they had all ten fingers and toes. I couldn't see their eyes because they were fused shut. They had dark hair on their heads and soft hairs on their shoulders and faces. They both had little beards.

The neo-natal specialist told me that although there were many hurdles ahead, the babies were doing incredibly well. "Don't worry", he said. "Trust me."

When I was well enough to walk again, I joined the other expectant and new mothers at the dining room table. My former roommates were eager for details. "Did it hurt?" they asked me.

"No, not at all", I said. And I was disappointed that I'd missed out on the pain.

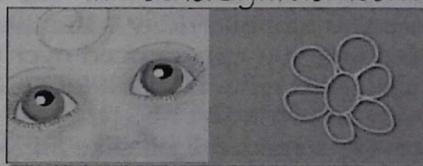
Suzanne is an American living in Japan with her Japanese husband and six-year-old twins. Her stories, essays, reviews and articles have appeared in a variety of publications including Literary Mama, Brain, Child, New York Stories, and the anthology It's a Boy! She is also the editor of the anthology, The Broken Bridge: Fiction from Expatriates in Literary Japan.

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Flicker of Light

by Michele Corkery

Pure pain wakes me up from a sleep that has taken hours to begin. It pinches deep in my abdomen. There are bellows where my uterus should be; they pump near-fluorescent blood rather than air. Tears stream, and I try to focus on my breathing. I rub my palm in a circle on my belly. Hang on, I plead. I take no aspirin or ibuprofen.

It is the morning after the brown discharge appears, and I need to have my first ultrasound. The day after the doctor says she is "exceedingly hopeful" because she saw the heartbeat. The day after the doctor says not to worry unless I begin to bleed a pad an hour. Initially I think this means the baby is okay unless I bleed a pad an hour. As I lay in bed focusing on my breath and the bellows and the life whose heartbeat I had seen the day before, I realize that only I am okay unless I soak a pad an hour. As my husband sleeps beside me, I expel life on white cotton pads.

Nothing. The first ultrasound had shown a dark gray mass, a balloon filled with water. A flicker of light that was a heartbeat. Today I see nothing but the broken dots of the image. I barely feel the warm gel on my belly as the technician moves the paddle, pressing harder.

"It doesn't look good," I say, once the technician leaves to get the probe for the internal ultrasound. "The last time I was able to see the baby." My father squeezes my hand just like he used to when I was sick as a child. He has chosen to come with me. He happened to be in Boston for a doctor's appointment when he found out I would have another ultrasound that afternoon so he came with me since my husband Joe was already at work.

Although we plan that my father will leave when I have the internal ultrasound, instead I tell him he can return if he wants. So he does, once I've undressed and draped my legs. I don't want either of us to be alone.

The technician is gone too long, and I can feel that the blood has soiled the paper sheets under my hips. At my request my father leaves the dimly lit room to tell the technician I am ready, have been ready for a long ten minutes. "She's waiting for the doctor," he says when he returns, closing the door behind him. This is when I know for sure. The technician doesn't want to be the one to tell me. I already know, I say to myself when I see her stricken face again. You don't need to worry about how to tell me.

"There isn't anything there. You don't see anything," I say with certainty as she moves the probe from side to side in my vagina. I am trying to ease her discomfort. "I want to take a closer look at your ovaries," is all she says.

It's the doctor who soon joins us and says, "The difference between this ultrasound and the one you had on Friday is that we don't see the baby." He doesn't pause. "The bleeding you experienced over the weekend must have been a miscarriage. The good news is that it looks as if you have nearly expelled everything naturally so you won't need a D&C." I look at the image the doctor is pointing to on the screen. It looks like an X-rayed piece of string. "See the strand here. Just some blood clots remaining in the uterus." The doctor says he's sorry to be meeting me under these circumstances.

I nod the whole time he talks. I utter a yes, a couple of uh huhs. My father says nothing while the doctor repeats the things that he has practiced in

his mind and then said to women like me. I knew miscarriages happened to other women. I never thought one would happen to me.

Once the doctor and the technician leave, a loud cry comes from deep within my throat. It surprises me, and it must surprise my father. He wraps his arms around my shoulders, buries his head in my neck, and then says words to comfort me as I sob. His eyes are red when he pulls away.

We meet with the next doctor in an office that has a window that overlooks the Charles River. I find comfort in seeing green grass, the clouds, and a blue sky. "There's nothing you did or didn't do," she says. "You didn't cause this nor could you have prevented it. They say one in five known pregnancies and 50 percent of all conceptions end in miscarriage." She also tells me that multiple miscarriages are rare and this doesn't mean I won't get pregnant again. She says the right things. I need to hear them, although I don't believe them.

After six and a half weeks of being pregnant my body had begun to change. I felt fleshy with my rounded breasts, heavy thighs, and slightly bloated belly. Joe had begun to call me "the grape." I enjoyed being pregnant and was confident that my pregnancy would be a healthy and uncomplicated one. I was so confident that I had begun to share my exciting news. I didn't like the idea of hiding such a miraculous event. I was looking forward to when my body would tell the world that a child was on the way. Still, I was somewhat guarded with my news, telling people that even if something did happen I would still rather that people know, that I didn't want my misfortune to be a secret people whispered about, afraid to address me directly. I said this thinking that it would protect me somehow since I hadn't kept silent until the first trimester was over. I was so certain that I would carry to term.

It was the getting pregnant part that had seemed so uncertain. Before Joe and I had even begun trying to conceive, I spent hours cross-legged on bookstore floors reading chapters on fertility. I learned that the "mission-style" (man on top) was best, not to use any lubricant because it kills the sperm, to prop my hips up with pillows, and to lie horizontal for half an hour afterwards so the sperm wouldn't leak out. I asked mothers and pregnant women I knew for tips-friends, family members, co-workers, my electrologist. "Robitussin, the kind with some ingredient that begins with a 'G' in it," she said. "It helps the mucus flow better, thins it so the sperm can swim more easily. Worked for me. I got pregnant right away." I bought the 12-ounce bottle with guaifenesin and posted sticky notes on the bathroom mirror so I'd remember to take it a half an hour before Joe and I had sex. One of my colleagues told me that the night she conceived her son, she visualized the sperm and the egg meeting. "I have no idea what my husband was thinking about at the time," she said. "But I was cheering on that sperm and egg." And so I too cheered.

It took us exactly two months, three cycles, to conceive.

Because I got pregnant so quickly, I began to feel that I really was in control of my reproductive future. I was a planner and my conception had gone just as planned. I'd always wanted to be pregnant by the time I was 35, and there I was – pregnant four months before the magic birthday. Once I had the miscarriage, I began to realize how little control I actually had. At first I held onto the semblance of control, remembering the piece of large furniture I'd moved the week before I lost the baby and the chamomile tea I'd drank

three days before that. I thought that if I could prove I'd caused the miscarriage, it would mean I did have control, and I would know how to prevent a miscarriage the next time, if there was a next time.

I realize now that even though I had only been pregnant for six weeks, I had already been initiated into the community of mothers, a community that knowingly welcomes a tiny being into this world and relinquishes a sense of order at the same time.

It was this community that reached out to me after I sent the one-paragraph typed note regarding my miscarriage to all of my friends who I had told about my pregnancy. Not only did my own mother call me every day for weeks and send Hallmark cards and flowers, but countless other mothers wrote emails and photocopied hopeful articles they'd read about conceiving after a miscarriage. Three of my closest friends shared their own stories of miscarriage, stories I'd never heard before. They let me cry and then cried with me. "It will get easier," one said. "But you will always feel sad when you think of what you lost, even years from now."

For days I wept. It was as if my eyes bled, too. I marveled when one afternoon I realized that I had not yet cried that day.

"I'm afraid you'll never be the same again," said Joe. I was hugging him on our bed, and I had begun to cry again. "I'm afraid you'll never be positive again, that you'll always be resentful." This made me cry harder. "I will never be the same again," I said. "But I will be positive again. Just let me feel this deeply."

I had always been the positive one in our marriage, the "glass is half-full" kind of person. I tried to see the bright side of every experience and thought of life's challenges as learning opportunities. After the miscarriage, I didn't want to try to see the bright side. I was completely and utterly despondent, feeling terribly sorry for myself. Of course the hormonal shift in my body had something to do with my mood, but it was deeper than even the biological explanation. Joe couldn't understand why I was so sad over the loss of what he didn't really consider a child. Sure, he was disappointed but also much more hopeful than I was about the prospects of creating another. "We'll try again. Just think of how much fun it will be," he said, scooping his hand around my waist and drawing me near. I told him I didn't want to think about another child. I needed to grieve for the child I had just lost, the one I'd already imagined as an infant in my arms, a toddler holding my hand on the beach.

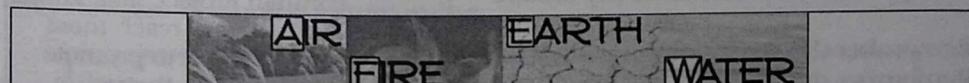
I had already begun to care so deeply for this child that I had begun to distance myself from my husband and the experiences we'd had before we had started to conceive. We had spent eight years together before trying to have a baby, and much of that time had been spent traveling, finding our careers, working our way through graduate school, and pursuing our personal creative interests-my creative writing, his painting. We were both moving forward in parallel directions at similar speeds. Once I became pregnant my entire focus shifted to caring for myself and the baby that was developing inside me. My husband's focus remained inward, fully engaged in his own pursuits. There was no way my husband could share my sorrow because he had not yet envisioned a living, breathing child as I had. He had not yet

imagined what it would be like to be a father, yet I had fully projected myself into motherhood.

I am not saying that the miscarriage I experienced was in any way close to the grief a mother experiences after losing a living, breathing child. There is no comparison. But what is clear to me now is that I felt the pain much more deeply than my husband because I had already imagined myself mothering a child, even before conception. I had begun to prepare my mind and body for what was to come, long before the four vertical pink lines appeared on the pregnancy test.

I saved no fetal tissue to bury, no ultrasound photograph of the flicker of light that was a heartbeat, no bloodstained cloth to place in the earth. Only a poem I wrote the day after I found out I was pregnant and a card from a dear friend that quotes a Native American proverb: "If the eyes had no tears, the soul would have no rainbow." In the December morning sun, I copied the poem in red ink on hand-made paper. Then to its corner I touched a flame. The fire spread, until there was nothing left but black ashes dusting the metal container. To the card, I touched another flame. And another. Until the card had changed form. Later, I went to the ocean alone and sprinkled the ashes along the tide.

Michele Corkery is a writer, a mother, a wife, and a communications professional. She juggles it all while still attempting to enjoy the small moments in life. She graduated with a Bachelors degree in Political Science from Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, and years later pursued her passion at Emerson College, graduating in 1998 with a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. She is mother to a five-year-old daughter and spouse to an artist/arts educator. The happy family lives at the Artist Building, an artist-owned loft building in Boston.



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For My Sister

by Della Dajani

A tear trails down your cheek
Gently I kiss it away.
Wet and salty on my lips
my heart entwines with yours
Imprinting your sadness.

My arms slip around you
Your body heaves with sobs.
Raw and piercing pain
Jousts with memories from
Cold, Lost, Forgotten pasts.

Tightly I embrace you
Soft whispers in your ear
Calm, Breezy, Warm with love
Soothing and unconditional
comforts and understanding.

Today I am the foundation
that holds our very beings together.
Take from me my strength, my love,
my desire to escape from victimization
and be forever a glorious survivor.

Today I hold you tight...feel my love.
Today I hold you close...take my breath.

Remember the source of this strength.
Remember the source of my love.
Remember the source of my comforts.
For tomorrow, the foundation may break
And in your arms I will need reminding.

"The civil and canon law, state and church alike, make the mothers of the race a helpless, ostracized class, pariahs of a corrupt civilization. In view of woman's multiplied wrongs, my heart oft echoes the Russian poet who said: "God has forgotten where he hid the key to woman's emancipation."

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Suffragist and Writer

Della also runs Project Sling, a sling donation project. Here's what she has to say about it.

"Project Sling has been a long time idea I've had since I started sewing slings years ago. I have been giving two slings a month away to moms who could not afford to purchase slings on their own. In creating Project Sling I am hoping to get other people involved in sling making and giving. At some points I've had a list of 10-12 people waiting for slings.

I've received many gifts of fabric, and often times when someone sends fabric for a custom order, they send in extra fabric to go towards Project Sling. People have been very generous to Project Sling! Each sling requires 2.5 yards of fabric, the rings costing \$3.00 a pair. I buy most of my fabric for Project Sling off discount tables at various Fabric shops. I can make a sling for as little as \$8.50, and that includes shipping. Most slings, because of fabric costs, in reality cost between \$11-20.00 in just supplies to make.

Through Project Sling I hope to make it possible to reach more moms and babies and to promote attachment parenting through a good cause. Project Sling accepts donations of monies (for shipping and supplies), rings, fabric, sewing supplies, your time to sew (we'll teach you!), and of course slings and other baby carriers that are in new or acceptably used condition.

Project Sling offers new or gently used carriers for the price of materials, The time to make the sling being donated, and in many cases for free. I currently reach moms and babies in my community, online, and by referral."

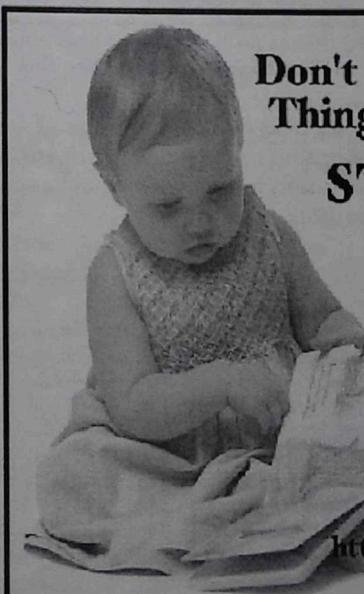
If you are interested in Project Sling
please email Della at
ProjectSling@gmail.com

Your Body Has Its Own Memory

by Leah Browning

After a few days, you know how to navigate
one-handed, how to fold the baby into
the nook of your arm. Nursing, that most natural
and impossible task, becomes second nature.
Mainly, though, you feel the stirrings
of your old and battered heart, pulled shapeless
over the years, webbed and broken, with its
worms of glue plainly visible at the seams;
you hold the child in your arms, and love
pours out of every crack and crevice,
surrounding your baby on all sides, replacing
the warm bath that had come to seem like home,
and forming an invisible shield like the one that you,
only now, are beginning to remember.

Leah Browning's poetry, fiction, essays, and articles have appeared in a variety of publications including The Saint Ann's Review, Arable: A Literary Journal, Mothering Magazine, Chicken Soup for the Preteen Soul 2, and Proposing on the Brooklyn Bridge: Poems About Marriage, an anthology edited by Ginny Lowe Connors. Leah recently completed her first novel and is in the process of writing two nonfiction children's books for Capstone Press. She is a native of New Mexico.



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A Look at the Suffrage Movement and Motherhood in Early 20th Century America.

Women suffragists Elizabeth Smith Miller and her daughter Anne Fitzhugh Miller founded the Geneva Political Equality Club in 1897 after having convinced the New York State Woman's Suffrage Association to hold its annual meeting there in that same year. The movements of the club, which

held quite a substantial membership and featured lecturers such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton (writer and suffragist) and Susan B Anthony, were well documented by the mother and daughter team. Between the years of 1897 and 1911 Elizabeth and Anne kept extensive scrapbooks of the club. Filling seven large books these scrapbooks give us a fascinating glimpse into the lives of women activists of the day. On the following 2 pages are clippings which originally appeared in separate areas of the scrapbooks but which I have laid together for purposes of this section. All show the role mothers were playing in the suffrage movement of the time and give a look at how mothers roles were perceived by the women themselves and the community at large in the early part of the 20th century. The poem, *We the Mothers* by Rose Pastor Stokes, is believed to have been published in 1908. In addition to being a suffragist Rose was a strong anti-war activist and social reformer. The poem is a powerful reflection of the emotional and political weight of American inequality. The second piece, *Women's Sphere as a Mother* published in 1908, gives us a look at what a GPEC meeting looked like and chronicles some of the words of Anna Cadogan Etz, another important women suffragist and writer. Anna talks of a woman's role as mother and says "The nation that shall first recognize the citizenship of the mother, will lead the world." The last document (page 34) is a speech on the role of mothers in the public sphere given by Charlotte Perkins Gilman before the GPEC in 1902.



Elizabeth Smith Miller and Anne Fitzhugh Miller at Lochland, Geneva, New York: 1909?

MML, Editor

Source Information:

All three documents are part of the Miller NAWSA Suffrage Scrapbooks, 1897-1911 as part of the Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Washington, D.C. 20540. Online they can be found on the Library of Congress's website at memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/suffrage/millerscrapbooks.

-*We the Mothers*. By Rose Pastor Stokes

Created/ Published [1908?]. Scrapbook 7; page 1

-Anna Cadogan Etz speaks on *Woman's Sphere as Mother* at Geneva Political Equality Club Created/ Published March 30, 1908. Scrapbook 6; page 58.

-Charlotte Perkins Gilman speaks on motherhood at Geneva Political Equality Club Created/ Published December 1, 1902. Scrapbook 3; page 107

Images courtesy Library of Congress

Monday evening at 8 o'clock in the Session room of the First Presbyterian church the Political Equality Club will meet and Mrs. Anna Cadogan Etz of Hornell will be the chief speaker of the evening. Her subject will be, "Bricks Without Straw." Mrs. Etz has been a frequent visitor in this city and will be heard with a great deal of interest. She is an intelligent and entertaining talker. In Hornell Mrs. Etz is president of the Suffrage Club and the Civic Club. The public is given a cordial invitation to attend the meeting.

WE THE MOTHERS.

By ROSE PASTOR STOKES.

We, the women of the world,
Who wield the pen, the tool, the hoe,
Who teach, and spin, and plan, and
sew,
Who help the world to be, to grow—
The world has cast us out.

We, the mothers of the world,
Outcast by the sons we bare,
For humankind we'll do and dare;
For man and woman do and dare,
For children mothers yet may bear,
For sons that need our larger care,
E'en though they cast us out.

We, the mothers of the world,
We'll mend the world asunder torn
By selfish children we have borne.

We stand together in the morn
Of this New Day.

And gently warn
The sons who cast us out:

The windows of their Council Halls
We softly tap.

Our sons within—

Will they come forth and take us in?
We trust that they may take us in.
Else must we batter down the walls,

And force the doors,

And enter in!

For if they will not take us in,
They shall not keep us out.

WOMAN'S SPHERE AS A MOTHER

Theme of Mrs. Anna Cadogan Etz
of Hornell Before Political
Equality Club.

The Geneva Political Equality Club held its regular meeting last evening in the session room of the First Presbyterian church. Miss Anne F. Miller presided. Dr. and Mrs. L. L. Van Slyke rendered pleasing vocal and instrumental selections, after which reports were given by the secretary, Mrs. Winslow H. Partridge; treasurer, Mrs. D. W. Hallenbeck; industrial committee, Mrs. Langdon C. Stewardson; the press, Miss Marjorie L. Guilford; school suffrage, Mrs. Robert H. Robinson; enrollment, Mrs. Verna Hemiuip Haley; the Young People's Club, Miss A. F. Miller. Miss Miller then introduced Mrs. Anna Cadogan Etz of Hornell.

Mrs. Etz, who is prominent in literary and club circles in Hornell, is a talented woman. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan and is well-informed on the leading topics of the day, among them woman suffrage. Last evening Mrs. Etz dwelt particularly on the sphere of the woman as a mother, and said that even though the mother demanded an expanded life, she was told that her place was at home with her children. "But," said Mrs. Etz, "to quote Mrs. Gilman 'The nation that shall first recognize the citizenship of the mother, will lead the world.' "

“THE MOTHER’S WORLD.”

Women Must Take Part in Affairs Outside
The Home if They Would Make the
World Better.

Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Gilman of New York gave a pleasing address before the Geneva Political Equality club in Collins' hall Monday evening on “The Mother’s World.” Miss Anne F. Miller, president of the club in introducing the speaker said:

I have the honor to introduce to you Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Her subject is “The Mother’s World.”

Among other things Mrs. Gilman said:

“I want to give you an idea of the progressive nature of motherhood. This world is a world in which our children must live and if it is the business of the mother to take care of the child it is her business to take care of the world.

In modern civilization the period of childhood is prolonged. As civilization advances the child’s energy is not all used up in work. For a child to work for its living is racial suicide. A child who has a chance to grow, spends its strength in growth and increased strength. If you cut short the life of the child you weaken the race. Our childhood lasts to 20 years, but you cannot mature mentally as soon as physically. Childhood is the product of civilization.

“The next question that arises is as to the mother’s duty in the world. The improvement of the schools is most important. The care of the children is the imperative duty of the state. She should also acquaint herself with the sanitary rules of the community and further their enforcement.

She can then take an interest in the affairs of the city, and thus better the conditions in which her child must live.

“In regard to woman’s suffrage, my attitude is that woman should take an interest in the affairs of the state. She must do something to improve and purify civic conditions. Then, if it is necessary for her to have the ballot to do it, it will be given her.”

The next meeting of the club will be held at the home of Mrs. F. K. Hardison, 154 Washington street, on Monday evening, Jan. 26.

For information on the clip at right please see page 32.

Cover Photograph

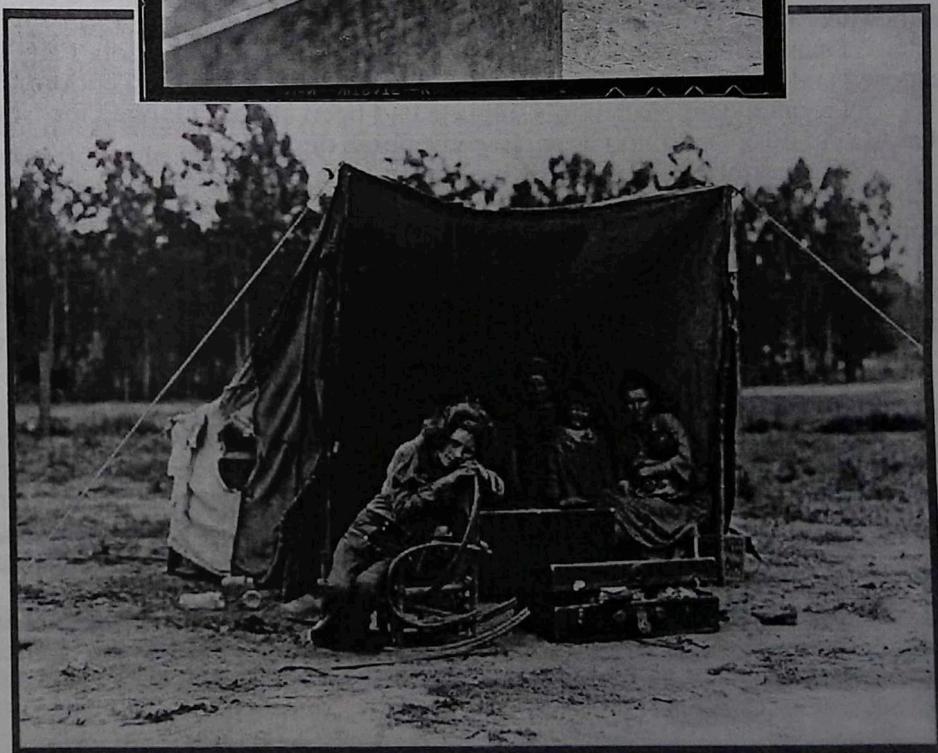
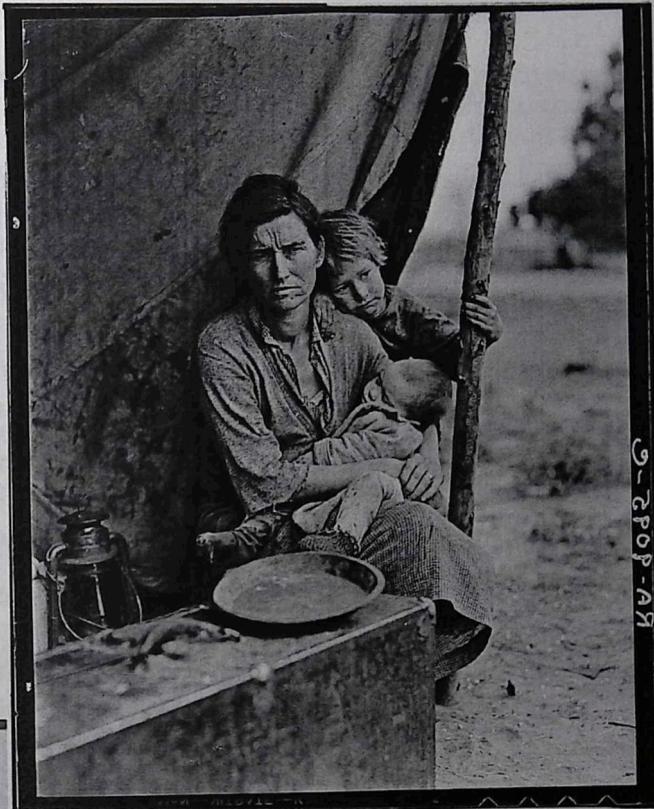
The photograph used for this cover is of Florence Owens Thompson and her children in February or March of 1936 in Nipomo, California. Taken by Dorothea Lange the photograph is one of a series titled the “Migrant Mother” collection. At the time this image was taken Lange was concluding a month’s trip photographing migratory farm labor around the state for what was then the Resettlement Administration. In 1960, Lange gave this account of her experience:

“I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it.” (From: Popular Photography, Feb. 1960).

Florence Owens Thompson would come to regret allowing the photographs. As an active participant in farm labor struggles in the 1930’s Thompson felt the photographs left her permanently stereotyped as helpless and destitute. Her daughter remembered of her “She was a very strong woman. She was a leader. I think that’s one of the reasons she resented the photo—because it didn’t show her in that light.” There is much more to Thompson’s story than meet the eye. An article on Thompson’s life titled *Photographic Licence* by Geoffrey Dunn can be found at www.newtimes-slo.com/archives/cov_stories_2002/cov_01172002.html. You can also read more about Thompson in Exploring Contexts: Migrant Mother at the Library of Congress. A link to this and other resources for studying the great depression and its impact on the people of the US can be found on the following Library of Congress webpage memory.loc.gov/learn/community/cc_greatdepression.php.

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, [reproduction number, e.g., LC-USF34-9058-C] Caption: “Nipomo, Calif. Mar. 1936. Migrant agricultural worker’s family. Seven hungry children. Mother aged 32. Father is a native Californian.” Location: FSA/OWI - J361.

Other Photographs of Thompson and Family from the "Migrant Mother" Collection



Florence died in September 1983.

Her gravestone reads: "Migrant Mother—A Legend of the Strength of American Motherhood."

A Measurement of Me
by Angela Peterson

My eyes are closed, yet I can still far too easily see the undisciplined wavering of the tiny light. For a brief moment, I glance at it through slitted eyes, fighting down annoyance. At times, its glow is so bright and inviting, and then just as I decide I love it, it flickers and dims so low I can barely see it, and it leaves me with a sense of bitter mistrust.

There is a steady draining of water; the only thing that I can truly count on in here. A slow loss, barely noticeable until you measure it from where it began.

The once intoxicating smell that made me want to breathe deeper than humanly possible has now left me feeling nauseous. The steaminess that was once so enticing is now smothering me; I ache for air of freshness, my skin needs the touch of coolness.

In the unstable luminosity, I can see the thin layer of mildew glaring back at me. I thought I scrubbed you clean, yet you persist with a diligence far greater than anything I've ever been capable of.

I reach for the curtain, suddenly frantic to escape this dark dungeon and the growing dread that comes with it. A narrow shaft of light reaches towards me from beneath the sealed doorway, and a tiny whimper from somewhere beyond promises me there's still purpose.

I stand alone for the time being, my hand on the doorknob. I am exposed and defenseless. I wonder which place is more difficult to endure.

I recall the time when this solitude had been all that I longed for. Now that I am in this place, I find its gaping emptiness depressing.

Its betrayal stings me to my innermost core.

Without a further thought, I turn the knob and step back into the world I had so frantically run from.

The smell of burp up fills me with a strange and unexpected sense of restored vitality. The thin layer of stickiness from a spilled cup of juice gives me an unexplainable feeling of impeccable spotlessness.

How does one measure what they have become?

That steady whimper from the bedroom upstairs brings about a miraculous realization: She is my One Reliable Beauty. She is the measurement of how far I have come.

Angela Petersen is a 27-year-old mother of two, who lives in Edmonton, Alberta with her husband of five years. Since childhood she has enjoyed both reading and composing all forms of creating writing. Now that she is a mother with children of her own, a lot of her recent work is about the many joys - and frustrations - of motherhood. Angela's great interest in Canadian History permeates much of her writing and, among other projects, she is presently developing a novel that focuses on the lives and struggles of Canadian Soldiers during World War One.

Motherhood on Hold

by Cindy Heffron

My husband and I split up over a year ago, when our only child, a son, was about to have his second birthday. We have joint custody of him and it is an amicable arrangement, although it is the most difficult kind of sharing I have ever done. When I first became a mother, I never imagined that I would have to take turns living with my child. Sometimes it takes all of the strength I have to hand him over to his father and just walk away.

Each week when he is gone for a few days, I find myself having to close the door to his bedroom. Otherwise, to walk by and see it empty, his stuffed animals in there lying on their sides, makes it feel almost like he has been kidnapped. And yet there are certain toys that I enjoy seeing right where he left them, in the middle of his pretending. He has a lot of miniature plastic people that fit into his cars and trucks. He calls them his "guys" and he almost always has one clutched in his hand. In fact, it is not unusual for him to go to sleep with one of these tiny figures tucked inside his fist. So, when I come across one of these little guys in my son's absence, it becomes a source of comfort to me somehow. Maybe it has to do with the smallness. Barely two inches tall, he stands there before me, the way an elf might suddenly appear to someone in a fairy tale. I'll sit down at the kitchen table with a cup of tea and I'll notice a guy in a yellow hard hat smiling at me, dutifully keeping watch from the place where my boy last set him down. Or I'll walk into the bathroom and find another guy, dressed like a fireman, perched on the windowsill. Once when I was reaching over to turn off the light before I went to sleep, I spotted one of his guys. This one was wearing a bright blue cap and he was standing next to a pile of books on my bedside table.

A child lives here, they like to remind me. He'll be back. They seem to want me to trust in that. I try to wait as patiently as they do. But sometimes I feel as frozen in time as they are. Only his touch can make them come into being again. Only when he takes hold of them can they regain their true meaning.

Cindy is a single mother of one son and works as a labor and delivery nurse and childbirth educator in Pennsylvania. Birth and mothering remain central themes in her everyday life.

"The night after my first baby, my daughter, was born, I dreamed I lived in a large white house with many rooms. Other people lived there, too. I was one of the group, one of the family. In this family, I had an honored place: I was the new mother. Nothing happened. It was a dream of great peace. My daughter is 39, and I still remember that dream and that feeling of great peace and fulfillment."

Judy Bridell is a mother and grandmother from Minnesota. Researching and writing her creative nonfiction book about her great great grandmother ("Elmina; Possibly A True Story," Heritage Books, 2004) helped her understand her mother, who died when she was 21.

Fast Motion Parenting

by Billie Younger

The echoes of the boom have long since subsided, but the ground under me is passing by as fast as or faster than when I first left the cannon. The point when the fuse lit the powder is more history than memory to me now. It wasn't the inaugural parental event when our first child made her first demands still wet from the womb. It wasn't when our second child made a wholly new space in our sphere of love that was so dominated by our first. No, these events, including first birthdays, first steps and first words were the warm-up. These were days of emotional and psychological training for the moon shot to come.

What memory I have of the actual blast plays back in my mind like a slow motion movie of a bullet hitting glass. It started with swim team. Almost 5, our daughter shot us into the jet-stream. Suddenly we were flying in the fast track of elementary school, sports, scouts, birthday parties, play dates and the myriad of target dates and social events that coalesce around them. And, we started collecting stuff.

In an ironic proof of Einstein's theory, wherein mass increases with velocity, each increase in life's pace has been met with a proportionate increase in accumulation. Home work and class projects cover bulletins and school news letters, hiding permission slips and important notices, creating a pile where a dining table once was. I used to remember what the table looked like, and why it was there. Piles of toys are slowly compacting in their lower layers, perhaps metamorphosing into fuel or mineral resources for future civilizations. Nooks, baskets, chests and crates quiver and strain from mementos, keep-sakes, and defining moments. We designed our house before we had kids - now I had to wonder - would the foundation hold?

Our family's foundation is holding, in part because, unlike brick and mortar, it can evolve. Sandstone notions we had of parenting and family organization have been shaped by a Colorado River force of children. And like the Grand Canyon, the wear and tear of this evolution has created an effect that is beautiful to stand back and contemplate: Our children have formed us as much as we have them. (I know that a cannon blast is fast, and canyon erosion is slow - but work with me here.)

Sometimes in the midst of the nearly constant head-long rush I notice my state. With detached amusement I observe the urgency of my appearance, like a cat trying to escape a bath. Meanwhile, the kids float through their week's activities as if they were at club-med - which is fine. Sometimes, but rarely, the tension of our jam-packed time-line raises a protest. Freshly minted, they remind us tarnished-coins to stop and take a reality check. We may have amassed more of life's lessons, but they're much fresher from the source.

There are times when the stress of parenting converges with the beauty of having children that are unique and transformative. At those times, a wholly different experience of life emerges that cannot be described vicariously. The rewards are impossible to communicate effectively outside of the reference point of being a parent. Parenting is an exclusive club. You need kids to join, no experience required - human cannonball skills helpful.

Billie is a designer, writer and artist, from California. She has been a parent for 8 years.

Thirty, Plus or Minus

by Monelle Smith

Thirty is probably too old to start up a punk garage band. My career as a runway model is also never going to happen. And the new Hollywood idol? Not me. Of course, most of us couldn't be runway models or movie stars even at 19, and wouldn't enjoy being in a punk band anyway. But the door was always open, up to now.

Although it's the end of rational fantasy, there are compensations to being 30. I have no idea, these days, if I'm supposed to wear my collar over or under my sweater. Kids today probably wouldn't dream of wearing a buttoned shirt under a sweater anyway. I don't care! No one else cares if I know how to wear things, either! I'm free to look like Frump-Mom, without fear of whispered insults from my peers. My peers are all too busy trying to lose the baby weight to worry about my shirt collar, anyway.

Speaking of baby weight, yes, there is a little more of me to love these days. But one decade and three babies into adulthood, I figure the maternal softness is a badge of honor—a war wound in my life. It proves I've gone through something.

Before my 30th birthday, I spent a few months feeling a rising panic about the whole aging issue. Like most young people, I had always assumed that the older generation was born that way, and that since I was fortunate enough to be born young, I would stay that way. Being old and gray was a personal problem. I'm shocked to find that I'm beginning to develop this same problem. And the older set just moves right on up ahead of me, like we're on a schedule. Amazing the way that works.

But now I've figured out the path to eternal youth: Instead of trying desperately to dress and act "young," the key is to choose friends older than me. I'll always be the energetic, young go-getter, no matter my age. I might even start a band, but now it'll be a children's music garage band.

Monelle Smith is raising three children near Seattle, and working on her coping skills.

Looking at Paris in this light fills me with emotions that I can not comprehend. The warm glow of the lights, the hustle and bustle of people coming to and fro, the sights and sounds all have me stunned. Each person with their own story about how or why they were there - mostly just to see Paris. I was there for reasons that I could not talk about with anyone. It was personal and for now, I wanted to keep it that way.

I saw my husband, Johnny, coming from a distance and smiled slightly. He'd gone to a little coffee shop to get me a latte, one of life's great pleasures! As he sat next to me and wrapped his strong arms around me I thought I may collapse. I was tired, the flight had been very long and the events of the day stressful.

Johnny gave me a kiss on the cheek and asked "How is Paris?" I looked him in the eye, tears streaming down my face and replied "Dr. Gordon thinks she'll pull through, just fine." She may be a small baby, weighing only 2 lbs, but she is filled with love! The love of me and Johnny, her soon-to-be adoptive parents.

Ashley Morin is a stay-at-home mom and Navy wife with a love for writing and creativity. Her children are 5 and 2. Her daughter, the youngest, was born 7 weeks early. They are currently stationed in Pensacola, FL.

Submissions Guidelines

MotherVerse is a magazine dedicated to the biological, cultural, psychological, and universal state of motherhood. This is quite obviously a very expansive area of focus and because we do not wish to limit the voice of any author we put very little in the way of restrictions on the subject matter we publish in our magazine.

MotherVerse is currently accepting open submissions for previously unpublished, in any form, poetry, creative nonfiction, short fiction, and free form essays discussing your experiences, thoughts, theories, and observations as well as photography and original visual art. Artists retain all rights to their own work.

Literary shorts, news, humor, activism alerts, history & science pieces, research papers and section specific submissions (see our website) are also welcomed. Feel free to query us with an idea, request a writing assignment or ask us about special research projects we may be working on.

MotherVerse is looking to feature intelligent, thoughtful, and individual pieces inspired by everyday existence as well as that which is outside the realm of normal daily activity. We are looking for pieces that reflect the author's distinctive perspective. We enjoy very much receiving submissions from around the globe and across cultural lines.

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We will only accept works by email at submissions@motherverse.com

We cannot, at this time, offer monetary payment to contributors. All submitters who have a piece published will receive a one year subscription to the magazine or 2 free copies of the issue their work appears in.

Visit www.motherverse.com/submissions.html for more detailed guidelines and section specific requests.

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MotherVerse is interested in receiving your visual art in the form of computer graphics, scanned paintings or drawings, photos of sculpture and the like as well as photographs. We are looking for images suitable for cover art as well as single images to add a visual element to our pages. We are also interested in featuring artists who have a series of images to share as part of a collection. Please email us with your art in .jpg or .tif format

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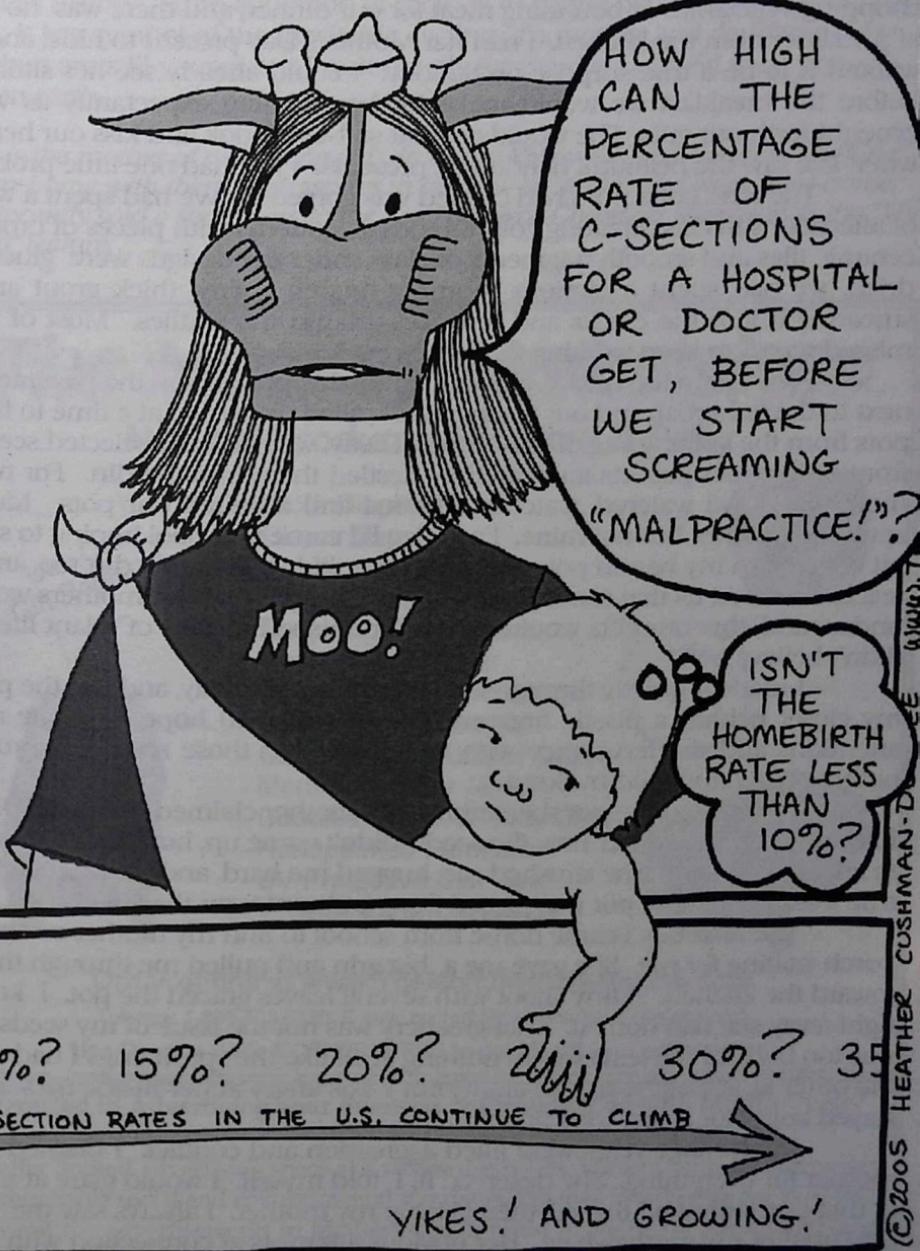
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A Barren Pot of Dirt

by Julie Crabtree

I remember trying to sneak through the sliding door when I got home from school that day. Mom was always in the kitchen when I came home, chopping vegetables or pounding meat for our dinner, and there was no view of the slider from the kitchen. I had her Mother's Day present to hide, and I wanted it to be a true surprise on Sunday. I could already see her sitting before the breakfast we would make for her, smiling expectantly as we brought forth our gifts. She would get that soft-eyed look and kiss our heads when she saw the beautiful handmade presents. I just had one little problem.

The terra cotta pot I had created was gorgeous. We had spent a week of afternoons in class creating colorful mosaic patterns with pieces of broken ceramic tiles and smooth fragments of glass. After the designs were glued and dried, we had spent a glorious morning mixing grainy, thick grout and smearing it into the cracks and crevices around the textiles. Most of us missed recess to keep working that day.

Next came the dirt. We had lined up our pots across the pavement next to the tetherball and our teacher had called us up two at a time to fill our pots from the spilling bag of dark earth. Lastly, we had each selected seeds from little paper packets and carefully nestled them into the dirt. For two more weeks we watered, watched, fretted and admired our pots. Most sprouted quickly, but not mine. Each day I'd come to school hoping to see a bit of green in my barren pot. A couple other kids had empty dirt too, and our teacher assured us that some seeds just take longer, that our mothers would understand, that our gifts would not be diminished by lack of plant life. I didn't believe her.

I made it quietly through the sliding door that day, and put the pot in my closet behind a plastic fireman's hat. I still had hope. Despite my attentions and the fervency with which I willed those seeds to sprout, nothing had happened by Sunday.

I presented the pot shamefully. My mother claimed she LOVED it, but I began to cry. I told her how the seeds didn't come up, how hard I'd worked to encourage them. She shushed me, hugged me hard, and proclaimed it a true work of art. The pot was placed front and center on the kitchen sill.

The next day I came home from school to find my mother on the front porch waiting for me. She gave me a big grin and pulled me through the door toward the kitchen. A tiny shoot with several leaves graced the pot. I knew right away she had done it. That greenery was not the issue of my seeds. It was too big and the leaves were nothing at all like the sproutlings I had seen in the other kids' pots. I played along, but I was angry at her inside myself. I stayed angry for a very long time.

My teenage years were filled aggression and conflict. I blamed my mother for everything. She deserved it, I told myself. I would glare at the lie of that pot, sitting on the sill, then glare at my mother. I always saw the pot as a symbol of my mother-hate. Her obvious attempts at connection with me were lost in the silent black dirt.

I never confronted her. Years later, on a trip home from college I saw the pot on the sill and remembered its history. I was overwhelmed then, suddenly, by the love my mother had for me. She must have hustled to the

nursery that day to find a convincing little sprout and waited excitedly to show it to me and mend my heartbreak. Maybe she crept into the neighbor's yard and pinched a little something from their abundant, blooming garden. I never asked, and I never will. I am just grateful now to look back across my childhood and know how I was cherished.

And now I am a mother. I think of the little pot and draw comfort from its history. From adoration of mother, to hating her, to finally seeing her truly, it is a symbol of the inevitable cycling of a mother and daughter. My children are still young, but I wait quietly for the day I can fill their pots of barren earth.

Julie is the mother of two young girls, in Castro Valley, CA, and has quit "working" to stay home with them. She aspires to become an author and work from home. She recently sold a short story to the San Francisco Chronicle Magazine as the "My Word" feature.

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Coming of Age

by Anjali Enjeti-Sydw

It left a slightly metallic, almost bitter taste in my mouth, my slow, plodding realization, that my older daughter, Mira, crossed a threshold over the weekend. Or perhaps the transformation didn't happen in the past few days, but occurred gradually, the way butter turns to liquid when left out on the kitchen counter in ninety degree heat.

The evidence that my frame of reference for Mira had been expiring, has surfaced in my conversations about her. I often describe my two dears as: "Leela, my infant" and "Mira, my toddler," despite the fact that I would hesitate on the "toddler" descriptor of Mira. Although I still considered her a toddler in my heart, my mind knew that, at three and three-quarters years, Mira hung in the balance between toddlerhood and ... something else.

This uncomfortable ambiguity became more pronounced during a trip to a mall one Saturday to shop for school clothes for Mira, who recently started preschool for the first time. Until now, I didn't really understand that there was a difference in "4" or "4T" size clothing, other than the fact that size 4T clothes were likely to have snaps in the crotch for those kids still in diapers. (I'm lucky that virtually all of my children's clothes are purchased by grandparents or hand-me-downs from friends, so I rarely ponder the intricacies of sizing.) And while Mira has been wearing some size 4 clothes since last winter, I did not find anything significant about this.

But one Saturday, as we walked briskly toward the children's section of Hecht's, I came to a haunting realization. Size "4T" is a toddler size, hence, these clothes are in the infant/toddler section of the store. Size "4" is a little girls size, thus requiring me to travel to the "4-6x" section of the store. And to complete the proof for this theory (I knew that geometry would come in handy one day), because $4 > 4T$, then Mira, much to my horror, is no longer a "toddler" at all, but a "little girl."

As I stood between the two sections of the department store, another realization hit me in the face. The size 4 clothes really did look quite a bit older than 4T. 4T clothing is often drenched in character images, from Pooh to Dora to Elmo. Size 4 clothing is preppier. The shirts have collars, and some are even button down. They look like micro versions of the "business casual" attire that is all the rage in the workplace. Sure, there are still plenty of overalls, jeans, and sweat "play clothes," but for the most part, many of the young children's outfits are half-sized adult leisure clothes.

Our shoe-shopping adventure yielded similar results. We quickly discovered that Mira's Care Bear velco-strapped, flashing-light, size 10s, needed to be replaced by characterless, mostly white, lace-up size 11s. After tediously threading a variety of single or double striped faceless sneakers, I sorely missed velcro, the trademark of toddlerhood. And when I slid my credit card across the counter to pay for my daughter's Sketchers, I yearned for the affordability of toddler brand shoes like Carter's or Oshkosh. To think that until now, I believed it was the pediatrician who measured, in feet, inches, pounds and ounces, their growth. My afternoon of shopping led me to wonder if my girls' development is more accurately gauged by the sizing of clothing and shoe manufacturers.

Since our trip to the mall, I've tried to pinpoint a period over the past several months when Mira morphed from a toddler to a little girl. Was it when she learned to dress herself? Was it when she stopped drinking milk out of a sippy cup? Was it when she quit sitting in her stroller, even for long days at the zoo? Or when, finally, she began actually playing with children her own age, instead of sidling up next to them to imitate their make-believe or snatch their toys.

I guess, slowly but surely, her maturation has been evolving gradually, much like the way summer foliage turns from shades of pinks and greens to deep purples, reds, and orange. And, while Mira seems to have shed her toddler-self easily, as if one day she just packed it away in a box to store in the basement, much like we do with all of her outgrown clothes and shoes at the end of every season, I'm having a bit more trouble with the transition.

On our way out of the Hecht's, Mira stopped short in front of a rack, where, haphazardly strewn across identical green and blue striped rugby shirts, was a two-piece Winnie the Pooh pant suit. It was clearly out of its element. Mira, still unconscious of the stark division of her young life and relieved to find something that evoked familiarity, exclaimed, "Look mommy, a Winnie the Pooh outfit. Can we get it?"

Although I wasn't optimistic, I walked back to the rack and searched for the tag. Sure enough, it was a size 4T, too small for my growing preschooler. "Honey," I said, as gently as possible, "this is too small for you. You're in the big girl sizes now."

Mira, slightly disappointed, considered this seriously. She then suddenly brightened, much to my relief, and concluded, "oh, well, we can always get it for Leela."

I smiled to camouflage the wetness lining my eyes. "Yes, sweetie," I nodded, as I squeezed her size 4 body tightly. "That's a great idea. We'll get it for her when she gets bigger."

Anjali Enjeti-Sydow is a former attorney who resides in suburban Philadelphia with her husband, her four-year old "big girl" and 19 month old daughter. She has been published in Catholic Parent, VerbSap, Mamazine, The Mothers Movement Online, and local parenting magazines.



Image created by Della Dejani

Jeanne

by Debra Monte Wetzel

My sister in name.
My sister in kind.
Whole,
Pure
And vibrant.
Soul sisters, Sisters of the Moon
Sisters of the Sun, Amazon sisters.
All of us together – one and the same.
The poison is pumped into your chest,
To fight the poison in your breast.
Hold tight.
Beautiful blond hair falls
Like scattered leaves.
Juxtaposed with a time of Thanksgiving,
The spirit of cheer.
Hold tighter still.
Pain
And blood
And drugs.
Spirit fighting disease.
Disease fighting spirit.
A body so young and so strong,
Manipulated,
Mutilated.
Hold fucking tighter.
Moon up,
Sun down.
Sun up,
Moon down.
Body falls in a heap from exhaustion.
Battle scars, battle cries.
Sisters unite.
Wholeness and light slowly emerge from the darkness.
The Phoenix rises.
Hold steady.

They used to give us a day--it was called International Women's Day. In 1975 they gave us a year, the Year of the Woman. Then from 1975 to 1985 they gave us a decade, the Decade of the Woman. I said at the time, who knows, if we behave they may let us into the whole thing. Well, we didn't behave and here we are.

Bella Abzug(1920-1998),
feminist and activist

Debra's work has appeared in Quiet Mountain Essays, The Link and the January/February issue of Back Home Magazine. An upcoming piece will appear in Mothering Magazine this year.

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The Heaven of Motherhood
by Hilary McRee Flanery

"St. Julian the Hospitaller!!" I screamed on the Emergency Room table.
"Poison ivy, Mrs. Flanigan, all over your perineum." The doctor explained.

"My pair of 'what'!?" I asked holding up the paper examination gown against my body.

"Your per-i-ne-um, your pos-te-ri-or end!" He repeated.

"Poison ivy - on my...popo?"

Did I say, popo?

"Yes, on your 'popo'!" He said, washing his hands.

I mourned the loss of my once, normal existence. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall receive comfort...and please, Lord, make mine 'Southern'."

"St. Sexburga!" I groaned. "Did my husband give this to me?"

"St. Sexburga?" The doctor looked at me like he had never heard of St. Sexburga. "Poison ivy is not a sexually transmitted disease." He wrote on his tablet. "You said that you're camping at Illinois Beach State Park, right?" He asked. "Have you been in the woods picnicking, hiking?"

"Why, yes." I perked up feeling a good story coming on.

We had come up the day before from humid, St. Louis, Missouri to go camping in cool, Chicago, Illinois on Lake Michigan.

Summer campin' in Chicago, with its sandy beaches baking in the sun is a rainbow of swimsuit days. But in the evening, when twilight approaches and you're out for a stroll under the whispering pines, surrounded by the acorn-scented, pin oaks, the swimsuit days become sweatshirt, nippy, nights.

Crackling fires, coffee perking, a chill in the air; it's autumn. Summer and autumn, two seasons in one. That's campin' in Chicago!

"We had an incident in the woods last night." I straightened out some of the wrinkles in my paper-examining gown as I began my story.

"Raccoons broke into our Coleman cooler and stole three to four loaves, three to four, mind you, of our Hostess outlet day-old bread. We have 10 children to feed, you know." The doctor stared, his mouth gaping, shocked that raccoons could open up a Coleman cooler. "Anyway, my husband and I chased them coons like 'possum up a gump stump' but they got away with all our Hostess outlet day-old bread."

"You're tent camping with ten children?" The doctor had a kind of psyche-evaluation look.

"No. That would be insane." This guy was as thick as dew on Dixie. Camping with 10 kids, can you imagine? "Our older two stayed home. We're camping with only eight of our children."

"That would explain it." He went back to writing on his tablet

"Explain what?"

"That strand of the Easter basket grass," he answered.

"What strand of Easter basket grass?" One of my eyes began to twitch.

"That strand of Easter basket grass I removed from your per-i-ne-um."

"You found Easter basket grass on my - per-i-popo?" My other eye twitched.

"Yes, your 'popo'. I removed it and disposed of it." He wrote some more on his tablet.

Oh, no, please God, no, not that. Not - Easter basket grass - ass!

I had been trying to vacuum that stuff up since March and here it was "knee-hi-by-July" or should I say "bee-hi-nd-by-July".

"So, as I was saying, doctor, the coons stole our Hostess outlet, day-old bread and here we were standing in the middle of bloody woop-woop and I needed to void." I winked and laughed. He didn't. I was beginning to feel like the world's only living brain donor.

"Anyway, I voided behind a tree and grabbed a bunch of leaves to use as toilet paper..." It hit me. "St. Hyginus! It must have been those leaves. They were poison IVY!"

"Mrs. Flanigan, what would raccoons want with day-old bread?" he asked very condescendingly. This guy had done bit the fat dog in the ass, with me. "Ten kids", he was thinkin', "her family never crossed the creek". Well, I'd be showin' him what a mother of ten knows. I'd spout off some Latin.

"Semper ubi sub ubi!" I quoted our eight year old, son Jack who was studying Latin in school. I would demonstrate that I could converse in practical Latin AND be philosophical too. "That's life, live it for God."

"Do, and you'll not be having this problem again." He pointed his pen at me.

"Are you saying God is punishing me?" I asked incredulously. "Are you saying I don't 'ubi sub ubi'... 'live my life for God'?"

"Semper", means 'always', 'ubi'... 'where', 'sub'... 'under', and 'ubi'... 'where'." He said. "Translation? 'Always where under where', then you won't have this problem again." He handed me a prescription for prednisone.

"St. John before the Latin Gate." I muttered. "I'm gonna' kill that kid, I'm gonna' kill him dead."

"I see you wear two brassieres, so why not underwear?" He pointed at my waist and chest.

I felt my chest and there was my bra. Suddenly, I became cognizant of something around my waist, too.

"St. Braulio!" I had on another bra around my waist. I WAS wearing two brassieres!

It all came back to me. After I had accidentally set fire to one of the campground's restroom commodes, earlier that morning, I had quickly showered, jumped out and snapped on my bra around my waist forgetting to pull it up. I had thrown on my sweatshirt and hurried out.

Back at our campsite I said good-bye to my husband and the kids leaving for their Nuclear Power Plant tour. I had gone back into the tent to change for my Emergency Room visit for my terrible itching. Not realizing that I still had a bra on around my waist, I must have absent-mindedly put on another bra and snapped that one on up around my chest.

"These aren't my brassieres." I clutched at my chest and stomach. "These are my sheep-dogs. They round them up and gather them in."

"The nurse will be in to give you a mild sedative in pill form. You can get your prescription for the prednisone filled at our hospital pharmacy." He left.

Oh, the Heaven of Motherhood... "booed, screwed and tattooed."

"I am the mother of 10 children... 6 boys, no lamps (the boys break them all) and 4 girls. My husband and I are known to be certified insane. We know this to be a fact as he is a Clinical Psychologist. He has a Ph.D., or "sheep-skin"; I have a Br.A., or "sheep-dog"; it rounds them up and gathers them in. As Hilary McRee Flanery, I write short stories and books to bare my soul because after 10 kids, God KNOWS I can't bare my body."

Morocco: 'Hidden' Child Workers Face Abuse Girls Working as Domestics Denied Basic Rights

(Rabat, Morocco, December 20, 2005) – Tens of thousands of girls working as domestics in Morocco face physical and psychological abuse as well as economic exploitation, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. Moroccan law denies these children basic labor rights, and the authorities rarely punish employers who abuse them.

The 60-page report, "Inside the Home, Outside the Law: Abuse of Child Domestic Workers in Morocco," documents cases of girls as young as five working 100 or more hours per week, without rest breaks or days off, for as little as six and a half Moroccan dirhams (about U.S. 70 cents) a day.

Current and former child domestics describe frequent physical and verbal abuse, denial of education and of adequate food and medical care, and sexual harassment by employers or their relatives. Some domestics said that employers forced them to work against their will by beating them, locking them indoors, or refusing to pay those who wanted to quit.

"There is a myth that these girls are improving themselves by working," said Clarisa Bencomo, children's rights researcher at Human Rights Watch. "The reality is that far too many girls end up suffering lasting physical and psychological harm."

Young and often illiterate, child domestics frequently lack the skills and the opportunities to seek help in leaving abusive workplaces. Hidden away in private homes, most do not attend school, rarely go out except for brief errands, and have only infrequent contact with their families. Some girls are brave enough or desperate enough to risk running away. But many more put up with abuse because they lack money and knowledge about how to return home, fear employers' threats of violence or denunciation to police, or fear getting lost or attacked if they try to make it home on their own.

Morocco's Labor Code does not regulate domestic work, and labor inspectors are not authorized to enter private homes to investigate violations of the legal ban on employment of children under 15. Police, prosecutors, and judges rarely enforce Penal Code protections against abuse in cases involving child domestics. Government child protection programs rarely prioritize child domestic labor, are poorly coordinated and lack sufficient funds for implementation. Few programs actively remove children from the worst forms of child labor, including domestic labor, and those that do exist have been largely pilot programs with limited scope and success.

Human Rights Watch called on the Moroccan government to enforce the legal minimum age of 15 for all child workers, ensure domestic workers the same rights as other workers, eliminate the worst forms of child domestic labor, and sanction employers and labor recruiters who abuse children.

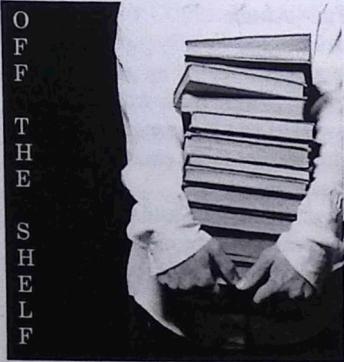
Select testimonies from child domestics quoted in the report:

If something happened—if I broke something or did something badly—they would beat me with a shoe or a belt on any part of my body. I couldn't leave the house—they would lock the door when they left... Both the husband and the wife hit me. My family saw me twice in the year that I worked. They came to visit me at the house but the employer sat with us during the visit and told me not to say anything bad or she would beat me more. When my mother came the last time to visit I told her I wouldn't stay at that house anymore. I said, "Either I go with you or I will run away or kill myself."

—Rasha A., 14, describing her first job, at age ten

If something broke, like dishes or a glass, they would tell me they would take the money out of my pay and they beat me. They used an electric cord... Both the husband and the wife were mean to me. The husband would complain if I didn't wash the clothes well or didn't bring the breakfast fast enough. He used bad language too.

—Najat Z., 11, describing a recent job



In many cultures there are those who feel that the subject of breastfeeding is taboo and something that should only be done and talked about behind closed doors, if at all. Because of this taboo it is often difficult for people to discuss breastfeeding with others, especially those breastfeeding related issues that delve into its more intimate and erotic elements. The book, *Fresh Milk: the Secret Life of Breasts*, by Fiona Giles, exposes all breastfeeding related thoughts

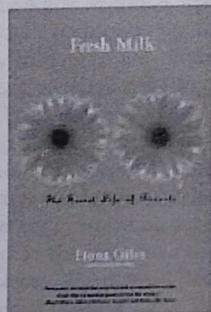
and experiences through stories from people around the globe, some of which will touch you at your emotional core, and some that will challenge everything that you knew and believed about breastfeeding before now. *Fresh Milk* takes a provocative look at breastfeeding, one that will open the realms of communication about breasts and all of its magnificent functions, some that many of us may have never even dreamed about.

One story in *Fresh Milk* tells the experience of a mother named Annette who was determined to have a more successful, pain free nursing experience with her second child than she did with her first, only to have that experience far outweigh the pain and tribulations that she experienced the first time around. Annette was determined to make it work, but after four months of cracked and bleeding nipples; multiples cases of mastitis and thrush; hundreds of dollars spent seeing lactation consultants; and finally a severe case of dermatitis of the nipples, Annette had to make the difficult decision to quit nursing. Annette's nursing experiences changed the way she felt about her breasts forever, and in many ways they also changed the relationships with her loved ones who were around her and supported her through those difficult months.

Other stories in *Fresh Milk* look at breastfeeding from a very different point of view, one that does not involve nursing a child. These are stories between consensual adults that are sometimes erotic in nature, in which women breastfeed husbands, friends, or companions; either for closeness, healing, or as a sexual tool. This type of relationship between two consenting adults seems to be more common than many of us believe according to *Fresh Milk*, but is a relationship that few talk about openly.

This book reveals the heart-wrenching tales of mothers who lost their infant nurslings and the stories of the mothers who did not have successful breastfeeding relationships with their babies. It also tells the stories of those mothers who were able to nurse one or more children for years with great success and little hardship.

Fresh Milk: the Secret Life of Breasts is unlike any other breastfeeding book out there and it breaks the barriers of standard breastfeeding discussion. This book is a must read for anyone who has any interest or experience with breastfeeding, conventional or not.



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